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THE WHITE ROSE.

VOL. II.

THE WHITE ROSE.

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BY

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"CERISE," "THE GLADIATORS," "THE BROOKES OF BRIDLEMERE," ETC.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE WHITE ROSE.

CHAPTER I.

RETRIBUTION.

THERE is something unspeakably touching in that holy parable which describes the desolation of him who has been hitherto possessed by an unclean spirit, as he wanders aimlessly through dry and desert places, "seeking rest, and finding none!" John Vandeleur, not yet married a year, had already discovered that for him there was to be no such repose as springs from a quiet heart. In his youth and in his prime he had scorned the idea of Peace, and now, thirsting for her loving murmur, longing to be fanned by her snowy wing, he felt that over the surface of those troubled waters, in which his

soul was sunk, the dove, however weary, must flit in vain for evermore.

Climbing the Taunus mountain with long athletic strides, he heeded little the glorious panorama of Rhineland, stretching round him to the horizon. What cared he for the polished stems and gleaming foliage of those giant beeches, or the black lines of stunted pine against the summer sky? The wide Palatinate might smile beneath him, rising as he ascended into tier on tier of vineyards, cornfields, meadow-land, and forest. The winding river, here a sheet of silver, there a gleam of gold, might dwindle to a single thread ere it vanished in the dim distance, that melted cloud and mountain together in one blue vapoury haze, but Vandeleur scarcely turned his head to look. He certainly was not of the meek, nor in the sense in which they are heirs of all that is bright and beautiful in nature, could he be said to "inherit the earth."

He walked on faster and faster, goaded as it would seem by some gnawing pain within, but stopping short at intervals to look round and make sure he was alone, when he would burst out in harsh peals of laughter, loud and long, yet suggestive of anything but mirth. Then he would hasten on,

gesticulating, muttering, sometimes even raising his voice as though in conversation with another. "I am miserable!" so ran his wild unruly thoughts, half-silenced, half-expressed. "Miserable! I know it—I feel it. And it's my own fault! I see that poor German devil in a blouse working his heart out at a dung-heap for forty kreutzers a-day, and, by heaven, I envy him! I, John Vandeleur, the man so many fellows will tell you is the luckiest dog on earth. And why? Because he lived to please himself till he was tired of everything, and now when he would give the heart out of his body to please another, he can't do it! Not man enough, forsooth! What is there in me that this cold insensible girl cannot be brought to love? Oh! you fool, you cursed fool! You, who knew it all, who had gone the whole round, who had once even found what you wanted and been almost happy for a while—to play your liberty against a pair of blue eyes and a knot of chestnut hair dipped in gold! But what eyes, what hair she has! Ah! Norah, why can you not love me? Perhaps it's my punishment. Perhaps there is a Providence, and it serves me right. Perhaps a man has no business to expect that he shall wage aggressive warfare on

them for a score of years, and win the best and noblest and fairest to make him happy at the finish. What fun I had, to be sure. Ah! those orgies in Paris, those suppers after the opera,—the masquerading, the champagne, the dancing, the devilry of the whole game! And now it makes me sick to think of it all. What has come over me? Is it that I am getting old? Yes, it must be that I am getting old. It's no use; Time won't stop even for John Vandeleur, thought the staunch old 'plater' has waited on me patiently enough while I made the running, I must allow. I am strong and active too. I feel as if I could fight, and I am sure I could dance still. Not many of the young ones could touch me, up this hill now, for a breather, fair heel and toe; but there are wrinkles on my face, I saw them this morning, and whole streaks of grey in my hair and whiskers. It must be that I am too old for her, poor girl, and she can't bring herself to care for me, though she tries so hard. And it worries her—it frets her, the darling. It makes her pale and sad and weary. Sawdor's an ass! He knew he was lying when he talked of Oakover being too cold for her in the winter. It wasn't the cold outside that made my pretty one so

pale. He knew it! And he knew he was lying too, when he ordered us here for change of air, and bothered about her being below the mark and wanting tone. Idiots! What the devil do doctors mean by talking about tone, as if a woman was a pianoforte or a big drum! And I should like to know why the air of Homburg is different from the air of Richmond or Brighton, or London, for the matter of that! I never knew a woman except Norah that London didn't agree with in the season. No, what makes poor Norah ill is being my wife. It is I who have injured her—I who would do anything to make her happy. And how can I repair the harm I've done? She has a devilish good jointure; why not set her free? It is but a leap in the air, a touch to a trigger. Nay, there are easier ways than those. And is life worth having after all? I should know better than most people: I've had the best of everything, done almost everything in my time, and, upon my word, I hardly think it is! What with rent-days, servants, men of business, lame horses, and that eternal dressing and undressing, there's a deal of trouble connected with terrestrial existence. I dare say the other place isn't half such a bore. I wonder if there

is another place. I've a deuced good mind to find out soon—this very day. Not till after dinner though. I haven't had an appetite since I came here, but I think mountain air and a twelve-mile walk ought to do it. Hallo! who's this in a nankeen jacket? I do believe it's Tourbillon. *Hola, hè. C'est toi, n'est-ce pas, Tourbillon? Parole d'honneur, mon cher, je ne m'en doutais pas. Il parait donc, qu'il n'y a que les montagnes qui ne se rencontrent—Hein?*"

The individual thus accosted, whom Vandeleur's quick pace had overtaken going up the hill, turned, stood for a moment, as it were transfixed in an attitude of theatrical astonishment, and then folded the Englishman in a nankeen embrace, with many quiet protestations denoting his extreme delight at this unexpected meeting, couched in the English language, which, priding himself on his proficiency, he spoke as only a Frenchman can. Count Tourbillon was remarkably handsome, about two or three-and-thirty, and some years before had formed a close intimacy with Vandeleur at Paris. The Count was essentially what his countrymen term a *viveur*, leading a life of systematic profligacy and self-indulgence with a happy philosophy that seemed

to accept Vice as the natural element of humanity. He would take you by the arm, and detail to you some proceeding of flagrant iniquity with the measured accent and calm approval of one who relates a meritorious instance of benevolence, or expatiates on a beautiful law of nature. Epigrammatic rather than fluent, terse rather than voluble, contrary to the accepted type of his nation, he affected an extraordinary composure and *insouciance* in the more important, as in the more trivial affairs of daily life. He would dance a *cotillon*, carve a chicken, or run an adversary through the body, with the same immovable face, the same polite and self-reliant manner, that seemed only intent on strictly following out the rules of politeness, and conscientiously meeting the exigencies of society. His figure was firmly put together and strong, cast in the round mould of his nation. His face very handsome and sparkling, with its ruddy brown complexion that no excess seemed to pale, and its bright black eyes, never dull with fatigue nor dimmed with wine. Blessed with an iron constitution, he conscientiously made the worst possible use of its advantages.

"And you have been here long, my friend?"

said he, taking Vandeleur affectionately by the arm and turning him down hill for a walk back to Homburg. "For me, I have been voyaging here, there, what you call 'on the loose,' and I only found myself at Frankfort last evening. I journeyed on at once. No, I have been too often in Frankfort to linger about the Juden-Gasse, and I have already seen too frequently the naked Ariadne on her Lion. So I took the railroad, slept at the Quatre Saisons, and marched up here like a conscript, because the mountain air always does me good. Ah! rogue! I know what you would ask. No, I have not been to work yet. 'Bizness,' as you call it. I have not even looked at the play-tables. Be tranquil; there are yet many hours till midnight. I little thought it would arrive to me to meet so old a friend here on this mountain, which, for the rest, interests me not at all. And you, how goes it? Frankly, you look well, you have more flesh, you do not age by a day."

The Vandeleur to whom Tourbillon thus addressed himself was indeed a very different man from the Vandeleur of five minutes ago. Keen, excitable, on the surface at least impressionable, and influenced by the temptation or the circumstances of the

moment, he had become once more, to all outward appearance, the agreeable acquaintance, the jovial companion, the ready man of the world, whose society Tourbillon had found so pleasant in Paris a few short years ago. There are many characters of considerable depth thus easily affected by external agencies, of which they throw off the consequences as rapidly as they arise. For down beneath the dark cold waters, slime and weeds, and ugly rotting waifs, and dead men's bones may be lying, foul, secret, and undisturbed, though the surface be smiling calm and blue in the summer sunshine, or leaping gladly into life and movement, fresh, white, and curling under a ten-knot breeze.

It is part of the creed professed by such men as Vandeleur to seem *bon camarade* before the world, whatever be amiss within, and perhaps they do cheat the Avenger out of a stripe or two, in this strict observance of their faith.

"Like me," replied the Englishman. "I have hardly yet been here long enough for Mrs. Vandeleur to begin the Louisen-Brünnen. You don't know Mrs. Vandeleur. I must present you, Tourbillon, I'm not so easily amused as I used to be. This is a d——d slow place!"

"Slow!" replied the other, lighting a paper cigarette, and inhaling its fumes into his lungs. "No place can be slow, as you call it, when one has a charming wife; and that yours is charming I need not be told. You shall present me to madame this very afternoon, when I have made my toilette. I trust madame derives benefit already from the waters and the air of the Taunus?"

"I hope so," answered Vandeleur absently. "There ought to be some redeeming quality in such a hole as this. I wish now we had come through Paris, only they said it would be bad for her. Why is it, I wonder, that everything pleasant must be either wrong, expensive, or unwholesome? Sometimes all three."

"Ah! you reflect, my friend," replied Tourbillon; "but your reflections are not of the philosopher. To be wrong! that is, not to think as I do. To be expensive! that is, to respect civilisation, to observe the laws of political economy. And to be unwholesome! Bah! There is no such thing. All excess cures itself, and inclination is the best guide. I wish you had been in Paris three weeks ago, my friend. They asked for you at the Jockey Club, and Frontignac even vowed he would go to

England to fetch you. We had an entertainment that only wanted your assistance to be superb!"

"I should have thought my companions were all dead or ruined, or shut up," said Vandeleur, laughing. "You fellows live pretty fast over there, and I haven't been on a Boulevard since *Charles Martel* won your two-year-old stakes, and Frontignac lost 50,000 francs, because he wouldn't believe what I told him; and that is how long ago?"

"More than a year, since he is first favourite at present for the French Derby. And imagine that you are not yet forgotten! Why, supper was hardly over before Madelon talked of you with tears in her eyes. 'You will see him at Baden,' she said; 'these English all go to Baden. Tell him that I will never speak to him again, but that he still lives in my dreams!' See what it is to have a heart!"

Tourbillon stopped to light a fresh cigarette, and Vandeleur laughed a laugh not pleasant to hear.

"Such a heart as Madelon's is indeed worth gold," said he; "and a good deal of it, too, as most of us have found out to our cost. I am sorry though she has not forgotten me, because it shows that she does not expect to find so egregious a

fool again in France or England! And how she used to bore me!"

"I permit not one woman to bore me more than another," answered the Frenchman. "But I agree with you. Madelon ceased to be amusing when she began to educate herself. The most charming person I have seen lately is a South Sea Islander, who has only been six weeks in Europe. I met her at Baden. She speaks nothing but Tahitian, and her figure is perfect. I understand also that she is most beautifully tattooed."

"With a fish bone through her nose, of course," laughed Vandeleur. "Count, I make you my compliments. I do believe if a female gorilla were to drive through the Bois de Boulogne in a mail-phaeton, a dozen of you would be in love with her before dinner-time. Was there any fun at Baden, and had you any luck?"

"I never got into one good '*série*' the whole fortnight," answered Tourbillon. "There was a run on the Red the only evening I didn't play, and an Englishman won a heavy stake. For company, there were Russians, of course, and a few of our old friends, but not so many as last year. It soon ceased to be amusing, and then I came away."

They were nearing Homburg now, and had already entered the long straight avenue of poplars that leads from the pine forest to the town. Tourbillon was still musing on the *Trente-et-Quarante.*

"That Englishman had a good system," he observed, thoughtfully. "It was better than mine. We came together by the railroad yesterday, and he explained it to me in detail. I think I shall try it this evening."

"What Englishman?" asked Vandeleur, who had forgotten all about his companion's losses at Baden-Baden, and was meditating, in truth, on Norah, and her prescribed glasses of water.

"Enslee was his name—Enslee," replied Tourbillon; "you must know him, I think. He is quite young; what you call 'nice boy.' He is a gentleman I am sure, and has a pretty wife. She plays too, but it is a woman's game. Feeble, yet bold, in the wrong time. She will never make the bank leap at Rouge-et-Noir, though her style might be dangerous enough for the Roulette."

"Enslee," repeated Vandeleur. "Enslee! No; I can't remember anybody of that name."

"I shall show her to you," exclaimed Tourbillon, exultingly. "You will give me credit for

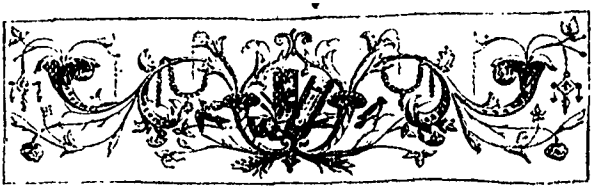
my taste. A bright, fresh-coloured woman, not very tall, with a perfectly rounded figure. I tell you, my friend, her shape is a model. She has beautiful black hair and eyes, but her complexion is as red and white as if she were a blonde. When she enters a society she seems to sparkle like a jewel. Let us see. She is not a pearl nor a diamond—no, she is not *grand dame* enough. She is a ruby—a brilliant, beautiful ruby. I will present you this evening. I know them both well. Ah! I turn down here for the Quatre Saisons. *Au revoir, mon cher!* One moment! I remember now. Enslee addresses her as Fanchon,—what you call *Fanni!*"

Vandeleur turned to go to his lodgings, the most beautifully furnished and the best situated in the whole town. Before he reached the door it all flashed upon him at once.

"Enslee! Fanni!" said he. "Of course it is! Good heavens! who would have thought of their turning up here? Gerard Ainslie, her old love—my Norah's old love. No, I'm not tired of life yet; and I'm not going to be fool enough, Mr. Ainslie, to give you a clear stage before you're ruined, an event that in the common course of nature cannot be far distant. The match isn't over,

isn't it? Well, we shall see who can hold out longest. The old one isn't beat yet. Though she mayn't love me, I don't think she can still love you. My darling, there is a chance even now, and if I could but win, you would save me body and soul!"

So he went up to dress without presenting himself before his wife, heated and dusty after walking, but his face fell sadly while he looked in the glass and thought of the odds against him, in the battle he had resolved to fight out with all his heart and soul.



CHAPTER II.

FRENCH LESSONS.

All women improve in appearance after marriage. With ourselves the effect of that valuable institution is precisely the reverse. I have a friend who boasts he can distinguish the married men from the single in any strange society he enters. Nay, he even goes so far as to assert that he knows a married man's umbrella in the hall of a club. My friend is a bachelor, and I think he is a little hard upon those who have shown a more adventurous spirit than his own. Nevertheless there can be no doubt that the husband thrives less obviously in a domesticated state than the wife. Fanny Draper had been a very pretty girl, no doubt, when she broke the hearts of her rustic admirers about Ripley, and even attracted the baneful notice of the Squire at Oakover, but she was no more to be compared to the

Mrs. Ainslie who had spent six weeks in Paris and a month at Baden-Baden, than the Cinderella in the chimney-corner to the glittering Princess of the glass slippers, who leaves the ball at midnight, having dazzled society with her splendour and magnificence. Unmarried, she had been but the crystal picked up, dim and rugged, from the beach. Married, she was the same crystal cut and polished, set by the jeweller, transformed into a flashing gem.

Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie now occupied a very commodious apartment "of four pieces," as it was termed by the half-French, half-German landlady who let it them, in a cheerful street not far removed from the Kursaal, and other attractions of pleasant, idle, wicked, good-for-nothing Homburg. They had now been married—well, long enough to be, perhaps, a little tired of it. Tired of it, that is to say, under the conditions of a narrow income, dwindling gradually to nothing at all; an utter dissimilarity of tastes, opinions, pursuits, ideas, and inclinations; a strong though unacknowledged sentiment of disappointment on both sides, and the daily inconveniences attending that mode of existence which is called "living by one's wits."

Fanny, indeed, was at first over head and ears

in love. It is but justice to say that with a very little encouragement she would have continued so. Gerard, on the other hand, had sacrificed himself, as he felt twenty times a day, to a morbid feeling of pique and disappointment, acting on a weakened state of bodily health, exposed to the seductions of a careful, loving nurse, and the fire of a pair of dark eyes, that softened and glistened whenever they looked in his face. He had given way in a moment of tenderness, without reflection, and behold him tied for life! "Till death do us part." These were the words he had repeated so lightly, and hour by hour he became more alive to their terrible significance. He had never expected it to answer, and it never did. In the first place, the only relative he possessed, his great-uncle, was furious, as the nephew knew he would be, and withdrew his countenance at once. The few friends, on whom this young husband thought he could count, soon showed him the fallacy of such calculations. One had lost a "cracker," and could hardly pay his own debts. Another was on the eve of making the same application to the petitioner. A third had promised his grandmother never to back a bill, and owed it to himself not to lend ready money. Everybody

seemed, by some fatality, to be living at the same address in Short Street—a locality, by the way, in which some of our pleasantest acquaintances inhabit the highest numbers. Gerard had nothing to depend on but his little capital and his commission. The first he soon exhausted, and the second he unwillingly sold. On its proceeds he was now leading the unsatisfactory, desultory life of an adventurer who tries to remain a gentleman. Of course, he went abroad. Equally, of course, with no career before him, no profession, no fixed pursuits to employ the force and energies of youth, he became a gambler, and for a time had little reason to complain of Fortune. He was what is termed a *good* player by those who are illogical and superstitious enough to believe that there can exist any element of skill in Roulette, Rouge-et-Noir, and such games as are avowedly and essentially ventures of pure chance. He would abstain from soliciting Fortune when she seemed coy, but if she smiled, would never hesitate to confide himself blindly and recklessly to her care. At Baden-Baden the goddess had treated him like a spoilt child, and when he came on to Homburg he found himself possessed of all the necessaries, and many luxuries, of life, in-

cluding a new dress or two for Fanny, besides a goodly sum of ready money in *rouleaux*, and honest *billets de banque* for himself.

These, it is needless to observe, he kept in store for possible reverses. None of us ever knew a gambler lay by his winnings, or in any way convert them into real property. It would seem that by some inscrutable law of nature no sooner does a piece of gold touch the green cloth of a gaming-table than it becomes a mere counter, and a mere counter it remains till it finds its way back to the croupier's rake, and is absorbed by the bank once more. A man who plays every day of his life, however, is sure not to be without good clothes, clean gloves, and such outward appliances of prosperity as demand only a supply of pocket-money. Gerard, in his pleasant lodgings opposite the Kursaal, dressed, hatted, and ready to go out, looked very handsome, and very like a gentleman, although a keen observer might already have detected faint traces of those lines about his lips which only constant, unremitting anxiety scores on so young a face. Fanny glanced admiringly at her husband as he put a cigar in his mouth, and reviewed his comely person in the glass between the windows.

"Going out so soon, dear?" said she, laying down the French novel she had been poring over assiduously, with a dictionary in her lap. "Why, it's too early for the tables yet. You know you never have any luck before three o'clock."

"Early!" repeated Gerard; "the time must pass quicker with you than it does with me. I thought it was nearly dinner-time till I heard that tiresome brass band strike up with its eternal 'Goldbreckel' galop. You've got an amusing book, Fan; you're in luck. I wish I could find anything that amused me."

She looked quickly up at him, but the careless tone hurt less than it would have done six months ago, because under repeated knocks the heart must harden if it does not break. Still there was a little tremble in her voice while she replied—

"The time passes with me, Gerard, not because I am happy, but because I am employed. If I didn't work hard how could I ever expect to speak French as well as I ought to do in my position as your wife?"

"Not happy!" repeated Gerard, for although he did not love her, he was sufficiently a man to feel aggrieved. "Thank you, Fanny! And yet I don't

know why you should be happy. Our life has been a sad mistake all through. I knew it from the first, and you are beginning to find it out now."

"You have no right to say so," she exclaimed, with the colour rising in her cheek, and her eyes flashing. "I know perfectly well how much you gave up to marry me. I have been reminded of it often enough;—no! not in words, Gerard; you have always been a gentleman, I will say that. Perhaps that was why I used to be so fond of you. But in tone, in manner, in a thousand little things, a woman finds out, too soon, even though she isn't a lady born! But I've tried hard, Gerard, hard—no, I'm not going to cry—to be good enough for you. Why, I could scarcely sign my name, not properly, when I knew you first, and now there isn't a duchess or a countess as writes—I mean no lady in the land can write a better hand than mine. The same with grammar, the same with music, the same with French, though some of the words does—do come very hard to remember when you want 'em. No dear, I'm not a lady, I know, but I'm trying my best to be one; and a woman's whole heart is worth something after all, though she *is*

only a miller's daughter, as you'll find out one of these days when it's too late!"

"I don't want to find out anything but a good system for the *trente-et-quarante*," answered he, a little pettishly. "I've made too many discoveries in my time, and one of them is—" Gerard stopped himself, for it was not his nature to be ungenerous, and he felt ashamed to utter the sentiment that quivered on his lip.

"Is what?" repeated Mrs. Ainslie, looking very resolute and handsome, with a burning colour fixed in her cheek. "Let us have it out, Gerard. I've strong nerves. If I'm not a lady, I've that at least to be thankful for, and I'm not afraid to hear the truth. Nor if I were a man should I be afraid to speak it, as you are!"

The taunt brought it out, though he repented a moment afterwards.

"Is this!" said he, settling his collar in the glass. "That a man is a fool to marry before he knows his own mind; but a man is a d——d fool who does know his own mind, and marries the wrong woman with his eyes open."

She never answered a word. His heart smote him, as well it might, the moment he had delivered

this unmanly thrust, and if she had burst into tears and thrown herself upon his breast, who knows? Perhaps everything would have turned out differently. She bent over the dictionary instead, and hunted earnestly, as it seemed, for some crabbed French word. It must have been a minute or two before she looked up, and her face was bright, her voice gay, though there was a hard metallic ring in it, while she observed—

"'*Pieurre!*' what can '*pieurre*' mean in a sentence like this? Can you explain it, Gerard? I shall never make sense of it. I must wait for the Count; he promised to come in and give me a lesson this afternoon."

Gerard sneered.

"Tourbillon ought to be a good French master," said he, moving towards the door. "He must have brought a good many pupils to perfection, if all they say about him is true."

"At least he is too kind and patient," she answered bitterly, "to despise a woman for being ignorant, and working her heart out trying to learn."

But it is doubtful if Gerard heard her. He was half-way down-stairs by this time, meditating I

think less upon Count Tourbillon's proficiency in female tuition, than his own lately invented system of backing *couleur* at certain numerical intervals, while pursuing a regular course of play on the black and the red. It may perhaps be necessary to explain, for the benefit of those who are too wise to affect such games of chance, that *Rouge* and *Noir* are simply arbitrary terms expressing really the respective amount of "pips" on two lines of cards, the upper of which is dealt invariably for black, the lower for red. Whichever line (amounting when summed up, to less than forty) counts nearest thirty-one, is considered to win, irrespective, except for those who are backing *couleur* (which involves a different speculation altogether), of the actual hue of the cards thus dealt.

Fanny watched her husband walk across the street, with a strange wistful expression on her handsome face. When he had disappeared, without once looking back, through the portals of the Kursaal, she rose and went to the glass. Here she stood for several minutes perusing every feature with unusual attention, till a well-known step on the stairs disturbed her self-examination, and she sat down again with her French novel ,and her dic-

tionary, smiling a peculiar smile that seemed to denote some fixed purpose finally adopted, rather than amusement, happiness, or peace of mind.

"*Entrez!*" said she, with a clear pleasant voice, and a very fair French accent, in reply to the knock at her chamber door; and Count Tourbillon made his appearance, no longer in the nankeen jacket of morning *déshabille*, but dressed in perfect taste, with as much care as if turned out for Hyde Park or the Bois de Boulogne in the height of the season.

The Count knew he was good-looking, but was wise enough not to trust his good looks alone for ascendancy over women. He had seen how fatal it is for an admirer to betray that he is thinking more of himself than his companion, and the ugliest man alive might have taken a lesson from Tourbillon in the self-forgetfulness he assumed when there was a lady in the room. He guessed Mrs. Ainslie was not born in the upper ranks, therefore an experienced tact told him his manner should be deferential in the extreme. He saw she was unaccustomed to extravagance, therefore he dressed more sumptuously than usual; and assuming that she must be neglected by her husband, *tout simplement*, as he told himself, because he *was* a husband, argued that con-

stant attention, and ardent attachment, implied rather than declared, could not fail to bring this pretty and attractive woman to his feet.

"And how goes on the French?" said the Count, after a few common-place salutations, compliments on *Mrs. Enslee's* good looks, and the usual news of the morning at a watering-place. "Ah! madame, you should return to Paris, where you made so short a stay. You are more than half a Frenchwoman now, in dress, in *tournure*, in refinement of speech and manner. A month in the capital would make you simply perfect. With your appearance, with your energy, with your force of character, a woman is capable of everything amongst us. You are wasted in such a place as this. You are indeed."

He sat a long way off; he held his hat in his hand. Nothing could be more frank, more friendly, more respectful, than his tone and bearing.

"I like Paris well enough, Monsieur le Comte," answered Fanny, "but after all, what am I there? I have no rank, no fortune, no position. My husband is not likely to make me one. I should be quite lost and trodden down in that great world of which we so often speak."

"What *are* you?" said the Count, with admirably repressed rapture. "You are an Englishwoman. Forgive me, madame. A beautiful, an intelligent, may I not say an enterprising Englishwoman? Such characters make a perfect 'fury' in French society. And you know what we are—you know the success that a woman may have in our world if only she is launched under favourable auspices, and will play her own game, without suffering others to overlook her hand. I do assure you, madame, that if I were in your place (with your face and figure, *bien entendu*), in six weeks I would have the whole of Paris at my feet."

Did it cross her mind that Gerard had never appreciated her like this; that perhaps he might be taught her value by the example of others—perhaps love her better when he had lost her altogether, and it was too late; that this man, older, more experienced, moving in a far higher grade than her husband, rated her as she deserved; that *he* would not have left her with a bitter taunt on his lip, and walked wearily off to the play-tables in order to escape from her society? She was a woman, and such thoughts as these probably did cross her mind. She was a woman, and they pro-

bably did not pass away without leaving indelible traces behind.

"I should like it," she said, after a long pause of meditation, during which the Count thought her face the prettiest he had ever seen. "I should like it, but it's impossible. You know how we are circumstanced. You see how we live. We make no secrets with you. We do not look upon you as a stranger. We consider you a real friend."

Tourbillon bowed, and his bow expressed gratitude, homage, cordiality, even amusement.

"What you like, madame," he replied; "what you wish; rather I should say, what you *will*, is sure to come to pass. It is such women as yourself, if you only knew it, who govern the world. You are kind enough to believe me a friend. I am a devoted friend, and one whom you may command at any time, and for any service. You—you little know all I would do for you, if I might only have the chance! And now how gets on the French? I may well be proud of my pupil. If you go on as you have begun, in six months you will speak as well as I do."

Count Tourbillon knew better than most men when to make running, and when to lie by pa-

tiently and wait. He had risked as much as was prudent for the present, and it would be wise now to content himself with affording amusement, well aware that when he had taken leave she would revolve the whole interview in her mind, and interest must follow in good time. The Count had determined to win the affections of this pretty Englishwoman, who no doubt seemed more attractive to him than she would have been to an admirer of her own nation in an equally high rank of life. Many little shortcomings of expression and manner that shocked and even disgusted Gerard Ainslie, utterly escaped the Frenchman, whose own countrywomen, by the way, are not quite so refined in the *boudoir* as in the *salon*. Tourbillon, I say, had determined to succeed, and perhaps over-rated the difficulties in his path. Gerard, with blighted prospects, reckless habits, and a preoccupied heart, was no match for the cold, calculating Parisian, armed with the experience of a hundred similar affairs.

Even at the disadvantage of his fifteen years or so, John Vandeleur would have proved a far more equal adversary, had the Count taken it into his head to fancy himself in love with proud, impassive Norah.

But they were all at cross purposes in this untoward little party at Homburg, and resembled pots of iron and porcelain vases hurtling together down the stream. Borne on the same waters, whirling in the same eddies, floating in the same direction, still the softest material is ever that which suffers most.

CHAPTER III.

"SUIVRE LA GAGNANTE."

LET us follow Gerard Ainslie into the plain, square, classical-looking building which constitutes the very heart and citadel, as it were, of the sort of town he now likes best to frequent, the shrine at which he seeks his oracles, the temple, alas! in which he elects to worship that false goddess, greater here than was ever Diana with the Ephesians, who demands from her votaries gold, affections, honour, self-respect, nay, is not to be satisfied at last, perhaps, unless they seal their devotion with their blood.

But the temple is very comfortable and well-arranged nevertheless. In it are found reading-rooms, ball-rooms, smoking-rooms, music-rooms, and a noble suite of apartments devoted to the object

for which the whole building is designed. It is with these that we have to do. It is to these Gerard bends his steps, dallying by the way, and turning often aside in the leisurely manner in which your confirmed gambler always gets to work. He is too anxious ever to *seem* anxious. So he wipes his feet carefully on the mat, though the varnished boots show not a speck of mud, removes his hat, lingers a moment in the reading-room adorned by an old French gentleman with a belly, a snuff-box, a white waistcoat, and a black wig, sitting as far as possible from a German lady of a certain age, in spectacles, dirty hands, and a brown silk dress, glances at a grotesque caricature in the *Charivari*, a column of *Galignani*, turned upside down, and so passes out again, much edified, by a door that opens on one of the rooms appropriated to roulette.

Here he salutes with grave politeness two cosmopolitan ladies whose acquaintance he has made at Baden-Baden, correct in manner, quiet in deportment, though dressed in a style that is, to say the least of it, startling, and with countenances denoting that they have *not* experienced what they themselves call "*bonheur au jeu.*"

From these, he edges his way to the nearest of the

play-tables, the outer circle, so to speak, in that Pandemonium, of which he will presently gravitate to the very centre.

Now in an English hothouse we have often had occasion to observe that the head-gardener, usually an impracticable Scotchman of considerable pretensions, leads us by cautious degrees from one forcing-house to another, each of a higher temperature than its predecessor, till we reach a stifling atmosphere that makes egress into the chill winter's afternoon a delightful luxury. Also, in the Turkish bath, a preparation which perhaps even more than the English hot-house affords to the lost and reprobate a foretaste of their eventual destination, we are ushered at first into an oven, in which identity is simply an unbearable burden, before we are subjected to such a furnace as renders existence an insufferable torture. So, I say, in a German gambling establishment, the metaphorical caloric of high play increases by regular gradations as we get further in. People who risk a florin or two at a time content themselves with dallying at roulette; those who are not satisfied unless they can count their gains in gold, affect one or other of the tables at which *trente-et-quarante*, sometimes called *rouge-et-noir*,

is played for such moderate stakes as a couple of double-Frederics or a few napoleons at a venture; while for the real gambler, the player with whom winning or losing means simply wealth or ruin, there is yet another table in another room distinguished for the silent attention and grave air of business pervading it, in which alone are heard such pithy sentences as these:—"*Rouge gagne! Couleur perd!*" "*Pardon, M'sieur. Quatre rouleaux. C'est juste!*" "*Deux cent louis à la masse!*" "*Tout à la masse!*" "*Messieurs, le jeu est fait!*"

The men and women, too, who walk out of this room always seem to be looking at something in the extreme distance, far beyond the walls of the Kursaal, far beyond the sky-line of the Taunus, far beyond the confines of the Fatherland, and the glittering windings of its beautiful beloved Rhine.

Gerard's temper, though he would have scorned to admit it, was a little ruffled by his own impatience with Fanny. He did not feel in cue to play; had not that confidence in himself which often indeed deceives a gambler, but without which no man, I imagine, ever yet rose up the winner of a great stake. So he stood at the roulette-table, and amused himself by losing a good many napoleons in fruit-

less experiment on the figures, the zero, the columns, the middle numbers, every possible combination by which Fortune tries to juggle her votary into the belief that he is not simply tossing up heads-and-tails with the *certainty* that one in every thirty-six hazards *must* be against the player.

"A Martingale, bedad! that 'ud break the Bank of England!" said an Irish major standing behind, and watching Gerard back his losses systematically, with an admiration of his fortitude no whit damped by its ill-success.

A pretty little Frenchwoman who had waged her solitary venture of a couple of florins on the number she dreamed that morning, and lost, shot sympathising glances out of her velvety black eyes, as she withdrew to the sofa by the wall, where she had left her companion, and observed to the latter, "*Il est beau joueur, ce Monsieur là. Tiens, c'est dommage. Figurez-vous, Caroline. Il a doublè cinq fois de suite!*" and Caroline, twice the age, not half so pretty, and on whom Gerard's good looks and dark eyes made no impression whatever, contented herself with a dissatisfied grunt in reply, and an utter condemnation of the whole process, room, table, croupier, players, and game.

It was one of *her* florins the other had risked acording to their compact. These two mustered, something like a napoleon and a half per week between them. On that modest sum they lodged, ate, drank, amused themselves, and even dressed becomingly. From it they scraped enough for their daily venture, taken in turn, at the roulette-table. If they won, a little *compôte*, or some such inexpensive luxury, was added to the daily fare, and they would treat themselves to tickets for the concert in the evening. If they lost—Well! it had to be made up somehow. There would be no concert, of course, and perhaps they must content themselves with a glass of *eau sucrée* for dinner. And this is how people live at Homburg.

Gerard felt he was wasting time, so, bowing to two or three more acquaintances of Baden-Baden, he proceeded at once to another table where the *trente-et-quarante* was languishing temporarily for want of worshippers. Its croupier motioned with his rake to a vacant seat, but the Englishman preferred taking his stand behind a grizzled Swedish colonel, watching the tactics of that warrior, and his inimitable patience under the losses they entailed. The Swede, consulting from time to time a little

card at his elbow, on which he marked the variations of the game with a pin, played obviously on some complicated system of his own, to which, undeterred by continuous failure, he scrupulously adhered. It was provoking to observe a volatile old lady opposite, with a Jewish face and bony knuckles in thread mittens, raking her gold pieces about here and there across the table, at the instigation of the wildest caprice, yet invariably doubling her stake, while the painstaking colonel as invariably lost his own; but it seemed to affect the latter not the least. He would only drum with his thin white fingers on the green cloth, arrange the bank-notes and gold remaining by his side, and put down the same stake in the same place, to be swept off in the same way as the rest.

Two or three non-playing spectators, and an Englishman with twenty thousand a year, who put a sovereign nervously down every now and then, but changed his mind and took it up before the game was closed, were the only other occupants of the table. Gerard kept silence for two deals, intently watching the cards; then he observed quietly to the croupier, "*Cent louis—Rouge.*"

It was a larger sum than the usual stakes at that

particular table, but the croupier of course imperturbably pushed Gerard's two *rouleaux* to the place indicated, and in a minute's time the monotonous declaration, "*Trente deux. Rouge gagne!*" increased them by the same amount. He left the whole untouched for the next deal, and again red was the winner. Gerard had now a sum of four hundred napoleons on the table.

"*A la masse?*" inquired the croupier, observing no indication on the part of the player to withdraw or modify his stake.

"*A la masse!*" repeated the Englishman calmly. Black stopped at thirty-three, and the whole came into possesion of the bank.

"*Encore un coup!*" said Gerard, smiling. "*Cinq cent louis—Noir!*"

Unfortunately the cards seemed inclined to see-saw. The old Jewess had just pushed her venture across the table. Red won, and Gerard lost nearly five hundred pounds.

"This won't do," muttered the unsuccessful player in English. "Business is business. It serves me right for not getting to work in proper form."

Thus speaking, he entered the inner room, took a chair by the dealer, pushed a bill across the table,

in return for which he was supplied with a quantity of bank-notes and gold; neatly done up in *rouleaux*. These represented his winnings at Baden-Baden, and indeed constituted his whole capital. Piling them systematically at his elbow, he took a card and a pin, glanced round as though to observe the calibre of his associates against the common enemy, and so cleared boldly for action.

The others took little notice of him. They consisted of a Russian princess losing heavily behind a broad green fan; an English peer throwing the second fortune he had inherited after the first with perfect good-humour and *sang froid;* two or three swindlers on a grand scale, not yet found out; and a dirty little man, of no particular nation, whose hat and cane were held by a tawdry, over-dressed, hard-featured, shrill-voiced Greek woman, and who was winning enormously with the air of being used to it. Indeed, if there is any truth in a well-known proverb and its converse, he looked as if he ought to be extremely successful at all games of chance.

It is needless to follow Gerard through the various ups and downs of an hour's play. At the end of forty minutes he was nearly cleaned out; the black, which it was his habit to back, winning more rarely

than common. A happy inspiration then induced him to place a *rouleau* on the red. It came up—he left it there. Again! again! still his stake went on doubling itself.

He believed he had got into what gamblers call a *série*, and he made a little mental vow that if he could win six times running he would march off with his plunder, cut the whole thing, and return to England.

With considerable fortitude he left his increasing stake untouched. The fifth time red came up, his winnings amounted to sixteen hundred napoleons. To trust his luck successfully once more would be to land between two and three thousand pounds; and now, had Gerard proved himself a thorough gambler, his venture would have been crowned with success.

A thorough gambler has but two interests in the world—himself and his stake. These fill his whole heart, and there is no room for anything else. Who ever heard of his being influenced by such weakness as the perfume of a flower, the melody of a strain, or the sound of a once-loved voice?

Alas for Gerard! that old Lady Baker, drinking the waters at Homburg because her skin was growing yellow as a duck's bill, should have taken this

particular opportunity of satisfying her thirst for general information, by entering the room in which the highest play in Europe was said to be carried on, and should have brought a companion with her —a pale, handsome, listless companion, on whom even her ladyship's losses at *roulette*—"Two double-Frederics, my dear, and the same yesterday; I shall be in the Bench if ever I reach home!"—made no impression; who was not even interested in the ball last night, the concert this evening, nor the balloon going up to-morrow; who little imagined she cared for anything at Homburg, except the railway carriage that would take her away, or that Gerard Ainslie was sitting within six feet of her, hidden by two stout German barons who stood behind his chair.

Lady Baker penetrated but a little way into the gambling-room. She had scarcely got her eye-glasses in position when the other pulled her back.

"It's very hot here," observed Mrs. Vandeleur, "and I detest the whole thing. Let us go out on the terrace." And the two ladies swept through a glass door into the open air.

It was a short sentence, but the full, low, characteristic tones leaped straight to Gerard's heart.

With the start of a man who is shot, he rose to his feet, much to the astonishment of the imperturbable croupier over against him; but he forced himself to sit down again, though mechanically, like one in a dream. Mechanically, too, he pushed the whole of his large stake across the table into the compartment allotted to the other colour, and then watched the deal with open mouth and strange stupefied gaze. Black tried hard to win, for the numbers came up thirty-two, and even from those fire-proof players rose the hushed stir and murmur of intense excitement; but the run was destined to continue yet once more, and the lower line of cards dealt for red stopped exactly at thirty-one!

Had it been otherwise, Gerard's inconsistent play would have been lauded for a master-stroke of strategy. As it turned out, the Russian princess, whose faith had been less unstable, simply muttered, "*C'est un imbecile!*" as she raked her own winnings together, with a contemptuous smile.

Gerard did not lack presence of mind; few men do who have led, even for a few months, such a life as his; and in less than a minute he had reflected calmly, not only on his own bad play, but on the absurdity of rushing out after Mrs. Vandeleur then

and there, which had been his first impulse, when he might be quite sure of finding her, as anybody may be quite sure of finding anybody else in Homburg, at five or six different gatherings during the day. Therefore he collected his thoughts, counted the remnants of his capital, and summoned all his energies to retrieve his failure.

But Fortune is a jealous mistress, brooking no rival, and, above all, intolerant of such an insult as Gerard's last inconstancy.

In a quarter of an hour he walked out on the *perron*, amongst blooming flowers and laughing children, without a florin left, to all intents and purposes an utterly ruined man.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WOMAN HE LOVED.

And it was not yet dinner-time! The whole thing had been done in less than an hour and a quarter! He was at his wits'-end, no doubt. He had never before experienced anything like such "a facer" as this. And the worst part of it was that he must go back and tell Fanny the truth—tell her they had not a shilling left—tell her that unless she happened to find some loose change in her pocket, they could not even pay for their dinner at the *table d'hôte*. And yet will it be believed that a single drop could sweeten the whole of this bitter cup? —the mere chance, the possibility of seeing and speaking to Norah just once again!

He sought her in vain along the *perron*, up and down the terraces, round and round the gardens.

Scores of handsome, well-dressed women were strolling and loitering about, but Mrs. Vandeleur had gone home and was nowhere to be seen. This disappointment vexed him far more than his losses. He even found himself wondering, with the wonder of some one else, as it seems to a man under strong excitement, that he should accept ruin so calmly, that everything real and tangible should thus count as nothing compared to a lost, hopeless, impossible love!

It was an ill-omened frame of mind in which to return home and consult his wife on what they should do next. No wonder the German servant he met in the passage, looking after him, shook her flaxen head, scared by the pale face and impatient gestures of the English *Herr*, usually so bright, and cordial, and kind. No wonder Fanny, still radiant from Tourbillon's undeclared admiration, felt a presentiment of what was coming when Gerard entered their sitting-room with a bounce, and threw himself moroscly, still gloved and hatted, into an armchair.

"That d——d Frenchman's been here again!" was the remark with which he opened the conversation. "The place smells like a hair-dresser's shop!"

It was a vanity of Tourbillon's to affect some sweet and rare perfume of which the fragrance remained long after he had departed. Music, flowers, song, scent, and sentiment—all these were weapons of which he made judicious use at the proper time.

"The count *has* been here," answered Fanny, preparing for battle. "You needn't swear, Gerard, all the same."

"I beg your pardon," he replied, bitterly. "You never were used to coarse language—never heard it, I should think, till you married *me*. It don't much matter now. You must be told the truth, and there's no time to pick and choose words, when the whole game is up!"

She was going to retort angrily, but something in his face stopped her.

"What truth?—what game?" said she, with clasped hands and anxious eyes. "What is it, Gerard? Tell me, dear. You're ill, I'm sure—or —or, you've lost more than you can pay?"

"A man can't well do that here!" he answered, with a grim smile. "Ready money seems to be the word with these foreigners, when you've got it. When you haven't, it's go to the devil whichever way you like, only don't be long about it! That's

what I had best do, Fan. Look you here. It has come at last, and I haven't a shilling left in the world."

He hardened his face to meet the reproaches he expected, standing up and squaring his shoulders, with his hands in his pockets. It put him out of his calculations altogether, that she should run to him, and throw her arms round his neck.

"I don't care," she sobbed, forgetting all her lady's language and good grammar. "I don't care —I don't care no more nor nothing! Never heed it, deary,—never fear! I'll work my fingers for you to the bone, I will! Only you'll be my own now, won't you? My own lad, as you've never been afore."

He was touched, softened. He looked down into her eyes with tears in his own. But to be thus taken possession of, while Norah was not two hundred yards off—and in such language, too! It grated horribly. I believe if she had spoken good English, and left out the appropriation clause altogether, she might on this occasion have conquered once for all.

"It needn't be quite so bad as that," said he, putting her away from him gently and tenderly

enough. "If I could get back to England, something, surely, might be done. But how to clear out from here! How to pay for the lodgings and be allowed to leave the country, that is what puzzles me! Oh! what a fool I have been all through!"

That last sentence changed the whole current of her feelings. He had not met her as she wished. Her heart was getting sore again, and hardening every moment. She took her bonnet (such a sweet little bonnet, with one red rose at the side!) out of its drawer, and began to tie it on with trembling fingers, opposite the glass.

"You have been a fool, Gerard," she muttered. "Never a bigger fool than to-day! Ay! you've lost a deal more than money or money's worth, only you don't know it!" Then she turned on him with a fixed, resolute face, and said quite calmly—

"I'm going out for half an hour, Mr. Ainslie. I think, perhaps, I can be of service to you. Please hand me that parasol."

"Where are you going?" he asked carelessly; "isn't it near dinner-time?"

She smiled—a hard, pitiless smile, that seemed to spare neither herself nor him.

"I am going to get you what you want," she

answered. "I can't promise, but I fancy I can bring you back the best part of a hundred pounds."

"You are going to ask your Frenchman for it, I suppose," said he, with a sneer. "Mrs. Ainslie, I've stood a good deal, but I will not stand that."

The hard smile deepened on her face.

"I am not going to ask my Frenchman, as you call him, for a shilling!" was her reply. "When the time comes, perhaps his answer to such a request will be a kinder one than I've ever had from you!" and looking straight in his face while she delivered this parting shot, the miller's daughter sailed out of the room like a queen.

Women certainly make themselves acquainted far more rapidly than men with the details of "the world they live in." How could Fanny have learned that the Vandeleurs were at Homburg? How could she be sure of meeting Mrs. Vandeleur on her way from the Louisen-Brünnen at this particular hour? Sawdor had certainly transferred his patient to Von Saufen-Kelch, and Von Saufen-Kelch's directions were to drink a glass of this sparkling mineral fasting, walk gently for half an hour, and then—drink another! But how could Mrs. Ainslie tell that Norah would so scrupulously follow the honest

German's simple prescription? Whatever might be the basis of Fanny's calculations, they were so correct that in less than ten minutes she met the very person she wanted within twenty paces of the spring.

There was no mistaking that lithe, undulating figure at any distance off. We must be allowed a sporting simile sometimes—Mrs. Vandeleur looked like a racehorse amongst hacks in every company she frequented, in none more than when surrounded by the *élite* of a London drawing-room. Now, as she was coming up the gravelled pathway, Fanny could not but acknowledge the grace of that tall, slender figure, with its gliding, snake-like ease of movement; the charm of that small, well-poised head, with its delicate temples, its golden chestnut hair, its pale, chiselled features, and deep, dark, melancholy eyes.

As the women met each other, face to face, Mrs. Ainslie had the advantage of being prepared for the encounter; Norah, on the contrary, was exceedingly startled and disturbed.

She had not seen Fanny since their well-remembered interview in the Rectory garden. She had thought of her indeed very often, and always with

mingled feelings not devoid of that tender, though painful interest, which a woman's heart can still take in any object, even a successful rival, connected with the man she must no longer love. Being a well-conducted person, in a certain position, Mrs. Vandeleur's better judgment should of course have decided on keeping such an adventuress as Fanny at a distance, but Norah's character possessed a little Bohemian tinge of its own. She was not without sympathy for a recklessness prompted by affection, of which she felt herself quite capable under similar temptation. Though she hated Fanny for running away with the man they both loved, it was with an honest, open hatred that did not prevent admiration for her daring, even something akin to respect for her success.

Altogether, if time had been given for consideration, she would probably have determined on meeting Mrs. Ainslie with the cold, formal greeting of a distant acquaintance; but time was not given, for the latter came on her almost too quickly for recognition, and with considerable tact under the circumstances plunged at once *in medias res*.

"Oh! Miss Welby, Miss Welby!" said Fanny in a broken voice, and seizing Norah's hands in her

own, "I ask your pardon indeed, for I should say Mrs. Vandeleur, but things are so changed now with you and me. And we're ruined!—we are! We haven't a penny to bless ourselves left, and never a friend in this foreign country but yourself, Miss Welby,—I mean Mrs. Vandeleur; and if you won't help us, I'm sure I don't know what to do no more than a child—I don't! I don't!"

"Ruined!" repeated Norah, shocked, and, it must be admitted, utterly taken aback by so unexpected an ebullition. "Ruined, Fanny!" (she could not quite bring herself to say Mrs. Ainslie). "My good girl, what do you mean? Has anything happened to your husband?" (Here her voice faltered a little.) "Is it sorrow, or sickness, or what is it? Of course, I'll help you, if I can."

Fanny carried the shapely, well-gloved hand she held up to her lips. Impulsive, impressionable, a natural actress, she threw herself unreservedly into the sentiment of the moment, and if such a paradox is admissible, could be sincere even in her duplicity.

"I knew you would," she murmured, her fine eyes filling with real tears; "I knew you would. I haven't forgotten what a kind heart you always had. It's money we want, Mrs. Vandeleur; money

to take us back to England. We haven't so much as a florin left to get us a dinner!"

The tears had come to Norah's blue eyes, too, and for a moment Fanny's heart smote her to meet so kindly a sympathy, but it hardened again directly with the jealousy that survives in such hearts, long after love is dead, for Norah exclaimed all unconsciously—"You don't mean that Gerard—that Mr. Ainslie is starving! Gracious heavens! and I to know nothing of it! You mustn't stay a minute! You must go to him directly. Tell me at once. How much money do you want?"

Fanny reflected. "A hundred pounds," said she, "would take us to England and set us up again. At least, would put us in the way of getting a livelihood."

"A hundred pounds only!" echoed Norah, with that glorious contempt for a hundred pounds entertained by every woman who does not know what it is to live on her own resources, and by a good many who do. "You shall have it directly. Come with me this instant. The idea of poor Gerard having no dinner for want of a hundred pounds!"

She had forgotten all about his folly, his inconstancy, and even his wife, though the latter was

walking by her side; forgotten everything but that her Gerard, whom she used so to love, was starving, and she could help him! But could she help him? The doubt came on her like the shock of a shower-bath. Mrs. Vandeleur's stock of ready-money was usually at a low ebb; in fact, she seldom wanted any. The servants always had change, and Mr. Vandeleur paid all her bills, to do him justice, without a murmur, though they were of no trifling amount, Norah being inclined to carelessness on such matters,—so that really she seldom found occasion to put her hand in her pocket. To-day she knew she had one florin in a ridiculous little porte-monnaie she insisted on carrying about, because she had given its fellow to the girl at the well. This was the whole of her capital. She remembered there was neither *kreutzer*, nor *groschen*, nor *sou*, nor halfpenny, nor any denomination of coin, foreign or British, in the jewel-case at home. Stay! The jewel-case! Might not jewels help her out here, as effectually as gold? She glanced down to her shapely arm; at its wrist dangled a bracelet, in which were set two or three precious stones, of undoubted value—a trinket, not in the best taste, but worth a good

deal of money: one of Vandeleur's many gifts since her marriage. Surely, this was the very thing.

"In here, Fanny!" she exclaimed, hurrying her companion into a flashy little shop, or rather stall, displaying beads, crystals, drinking-cups, views of the Taunus, rubbish for all tastes, and cheap jewellery of every description.

In a moment her bracelet was dashed on the counter, and under inspection by a German Jew, with a dim gold ring on a dirty fore-finger, who shook his head depreciatingly, of course, as he would have shaken it by instinct if requested to advance a hundred florins on the Koh-i-noor diamond.

It was no novelty to this cautious speculator thus to examine feminine personalties. Everybody in Homburg passed his shop five or six times a day, and he was in the hourly habit of pricing all kinds of articles at one-third of their market value, and even giving for them as much as half. A kind little man, too, in manner, and a friendly, notwithstanding his faith, his profession, and his grimy hands.

Mrs. Vandeleur was always a little impetuous. "There!" said she in her native language—"take that; the stones are real, and it's good gold. Give me a hundred pounds sterling for it—and be quick."

He spoke English, of course, in his own way, as he spoke half-a-dozen European tongues. Poising the bracelet in his hand, he looked blandly into Norah's face, and observed—

"A hundred *gulden*, honourable lady—a hundred *gulden* (*mintz*); or you shall have your English money at 11 48, the rate of exchange this morning in Frankfort, and—and——," observing the cloud on his customer's brow, "anything else you like out of my shop, for an *andenken*, honourable lady. There is *bric-a-brac* and French clocks, and ver' goot Turkish shawls behind there, and slippers, and amber, *und so weiter, und so weiter*," bowing lower and looking more persuasive with every fresh enumeration.

"One hundred pounds!" repeated Norah, shutting her lips tight, as was her habit when very much in earnest. "It's worth more than two, I know. Take it, or leave it! There's another shop three doors lower down."

"Fifty, honourable lady. Sixty—seventy!" expostulated the buyer, increasing his bid every time he looked at Mrs. Vandeleur's unyielding face. "Eighty and five! Well, well, to favour a gracious and honourable lady, let us say a hundred, and ten

guldens thrown back. "'Not a florin! Not a *kreutzer!* Ah! be it so. Bot I sall gain nozing, *gar nichts*, ven I send him to Frankfort to be sold;" and the old fellow counted out the money in French and German paper with an admirable assumption of combining the courtesy due to a lady with the satisfaction of performing a charitable action.

Norah crumpled it all up together and left the shop, scarce deigning to return a nod for the many bows and entreaties for her future custom, with which the little man ushered her out.

No sooner was she in the street, than she pushed the packet into Mrs. Ainslie's hands. "Take it, Fanny," she said, "and welcome. Heartily welcome! Only," and here her eyes looked wild, and her voice came as if she were choking, "whatever happens, don't—don't tell him that it comes from me!"

They were close to her own door, and dropping her veil over her face, she ran in without another word. Mr. Vandeleur, tired of waiting, had gone off to dinner. Therefore it is reasonable to suppose that Norah would go at once to her own room, and soothe her feelings with the refreshment of "a good cry."

CHAPTER V.

"THE WOMAN HE MARRIED."

FANNY looked after her long and earnestly for more than a minute. Then the face, usually so soft and rosy, turned hard and pale.

"She loves him!" muttered Mrs. Ainslie, clenching the soiled notes in her gloved hand; "she loves my husband—loves him still! Ay! and the right way too. I think I know how a woman should care for a man! I wonder what *he* feels about it? I'll find out before I'm an hour older. It's time something was done, and if it's as I think, why he'll live to repent it perhaps, that's all! I'm not the woman to be deceived and put upon, I can tell my lord! There's others besides him, just as good gentlefolks, too, that can look sweet and speak kind. Ah! a worm will turn upon you if you'll only

tread hard enough; and I ain't quite a worm yet—very far from it!"

Thus Mrs. Ainslie, looking, indeed, very unlike a worm in her pretty dress and her sparkling beauty that even an angry face could not wholly destroy. She had not far to go, perhaps scarcely a quarter of a mile, but into that short walk Fanny compressed the reflections and the possibilities of a lifetime. She reviewed her own past, but only since she had known Gerard; previous to that era it seemed well to ignore, even to herself, the habits and inclinations of her girlhood. She went back to the first day they met in the sweet early summer under the willows by Ripley Water, but the tears began to gather, and she forced herself not to dwell too long on that memorable walk. Even with its golden recollections was mingled the alloy of Miss Welby's presence, and Fanny could have cursed the fair, white face that had thus come always between her and happiness—wilfully forgetting that but for Miss Welby's rare beauty and Vandeleur's unscrupulous spirit of intrigue she had never so much as made the acquaintance of the man who was now her husband.

Neither did she like to think too much of the

happy time, despite its keen anxiety, when he lay between life and death, and she had him all to herself, to watch and tend and love, with trembling hopes and fears, in sweet uncertainty whether that love would ever be returned. How well she remembered the day when he came back from the confines of death to eat his chicken-broth like a living man, when, weakened by watching and anxiety, she burst into tears from sheer pleasure at the sight. Oh! for that happy time once more! and now it could never, never come again!

She could have wept freely, but that something fierce in Fanny's nature, a spirit of rebellion against pain, always came to the surface under suffering; and a reactionary sentiment of pity for herself, such as she would have felt for another, ere she had time to melt, hardened her back into wrath. He had never loved her, she thought—not even when he took her to his breast that day. It was only gratitude, that was all, and a young man's fancy for a pretty face. She had a pretty face, she knew it; and there were others thought so besides him. She would have made him a good wife, perhaps, if, he had let her, but he never would let her; and after all, maybe, it wasn't in her nature to be

steady for long. What was the use of trying to be good? It certainly hadn't answered with her. Best take things as they come, and "so let the world jog along as it will."

"And that there Frenchman," continued Fanny, pursuing her meditations half aloud, "he'd take me away to-morrow, and welcome, if I was only to hold up my finger! And why shouldn't I hold up my finger? It wouldn't break Gerard's heart. I don't believe he'd even go to the station to ask what train I'd started by. And the other's a real gentleman after all—a nobleman, as I believe; and I do think he loves the very ground I walk on. Is a girl never to have a home? never to know the worth of an honest man's affection? It's not been mine yet, but I should like to try. Gerard had better look out. If he don't alter his conduct he'll find the cage open and the bird flown. Ah! it's not the bird that he wants in his own nest. She's got gilt wires round her, and perhaps she beats her breast against them harder than any of us think for. Dear! dear! it's a bad business altogether, and if it don't get better I'm in two minds whether I won't take French leave. French leave, indeed! if the Count will chance it, why, so

will I. I've done a good stroke of business to-day at any rate. I wonder whether Gerard will think so? At least I've done it for him. I wonder whether any other woman would have done half as much.? It wasn't so easy to ask *her* for charity. What could I do? Vandeleur? I know him too well. He said that cheque should be the last; and when the Squire won't, why he won't—not if you was gasping for a mouthful of bread at his feet. Well, Gerard, it's about done at last, lad; but perhaps you and me will part friends after all!"

She had reached their lodgings now, and ascended the stairs with some vague, unacknowledged hope that she might have judged her husband too harshly. Perhaps he had got over his infatuation about Mrs. Vandeleur, another man's wife and all! thought Fanny. Perhaps it was but a boy's fancy, and he had forgotten it, as men do forget such youthful weaknesses—men and women too: she had buried a dozen of them, and even their ghosts never rose to disturb her now. Well, a few minutes would show. She could love him yet, for all that was come and gone, if he would but give her the chance.

He was sitting in an armchair, plunged in

gloomy thought, with his eyes fixed on the empty stove. His hat was still on his head; he had not even taken off his gloves. Whatever might be the subject of his meditations, at least it was engrossing. He did not even hear her come into the room.

Twenty-four hours ago she would have stolen behind him and laid her hand on his shoulder—perhaps turned his face up and given it a saucy kiss. She was too proud to do so now, but placing herself directly in his front, observed coldly, and in a tone little calculated to conciliate—

"I am sorry to disturb you, Mr. Ainslie, but I have been about your business, and have done, I think, as much as you could wish."

He gave a great start. He was dreaming of Marston Rectory—the roses, the cedar-tree, the lawn, the work-table, the slender girlish figure, the fond pale face, with its dark eyes and its golden chestnut hair. He woke to Homburg, ruin, and an exasperated wife; beautiful indeed and brilliant of complexion, but hard, indignant, bearing on her forehead the well-known frown that denoted a domestic storm at hand.

"*My* business?" he asked, shortly. "I didn't

know I had any! Nor pleasure neither, for the matter of that!"

"You needn't sneer," she replied, commanding herself with an effort, though the dark eyes flashed ominously. "So long as I remain with you, so long as I fulfil my duty as a wife, your interests are mine. I have been looking after them to-day. Count that money, sir. Oh! I'm not going to cheat you. If I'm right you'll find it exactly a hundred pounds!"

He was so surprised that he never thought of telling over the notes she held out, nor even of taking them from her hand. He stared blankly in his wife's face.

"A hundred pounds!" said he. "Why? what? how do you mean? Fanny, how could you ever come by a hundred pounds?"

Rather a hard smile lightened in her dark eyes, and showed her white teeth, while she answered—

"That's *my* business; *yours* is to take and do the best you can with it. I'm not such a fool, Gerard, after all, though I hadn't the luck to be a lady born."

He winced. Somehow she always said the very thing that irritated him most. It is no unusual

drawback to married life, this same knack of "rubbing the hair" the wrong way; and I think it helps to bring a very large proportion of cases into the "Court of Probate, &c."

"At least," said he, after a moment's pause, "I have a right to know where this comes from. You never had a hundred pounds of your own in your life, Fanny; nor anything worth a hundred pounds!"

"Not yet," she answered, with an impatient little tap of her foot against the floor. "But as the Count says, '*Qui sait enfin ce qui arrivera?*'"

The atrocious British accent of this quotation grated on his ear less than the mention of the Count's name.

"I have a right to know, Fanny," he repeated, in a stern commanding tone, against which she was sure to rebel. "I desire you will tell me the truth at once."

"Then I just won't!" she answered, remembering Norah's stipulation, and thirsting for battle on her own account, wounded as she felt in her better feelings, and falling more and more under the dominion of her worse.

When a woman takes up such a position it is

somewhat difficult to dislodge her. The only chance is that she seldom holds it for any length of time, abandoning it usually for the shelter of some grievance, real or imaginary.

"I can come to but one conclusion, then," said Gerard, mounting the high horse. "It must have been furnished by Count Tourbillon, and I decline to have anything to do with it—or with you either, after to-day!"

She turned perfectly white in her anger now. She had enough of right she felt on her side to justify any outbreak of temper, any breach of confidence. She forgot her promise to Norah, she forgot her duty to her husband, forgot everything but the bitter, cruel insult under which she writhed.

"It is not from Count Tourbillon!" she exclaimed; "and you are a base coward to say it is! I have it in charity—charity—from your old sweetheart! It's from Mrs. Vandeleur—there! Perhaps you'll take it now; for I do believe as you worship the very ground she walks on!"

He covered his face with his hands.

"God knows I do!" was all he murmured.

It was too much for Fanny. That stricken look, that sorrowing voice, that muttered confession,

wrung by surprise and suffering, proved more than a thousand protestations. She saw it all, and it pierced her like a knife.

With a gesture of intense irritation she flung the little crumpled-up bundle of notes at her husband's head, swept out of the room, banging the door fiercely behind her, and walked down-stairs without trusting herself to say another word.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RULING PASSION.

GERARD, left alone with his own reflections, sat for a while in a brown study opposite the stove. By degrees, the past came back in regular succession, like the scenes of a diorama, or rather faint and distorted as on the slides of a magic lantern. It was with a thrill of something akin to actual happiness that he considered his utter ruin, for, had it not brought him the assurance that he still lived in Norah's memory, nay, that he still occupied some portion of a heart, once wholly his own? For a moment, I say, he was almost happy. Then came the self-torture to which such dispositions are peculiarly subject; the misgivings from which coarser organisations, secure in their own good opinion, are wholly free; the morbid depre-

ciation of its real value, so often entertained by an engrossing affection acting on a sensitive and imaginative temperament, not yet experienced in the selfishness of mankind, and ignorant how rare, and consequently how precious, is an honest, undivided love, adulterated by no considerations of interest or vanity or advancement. He remembered now the painful longing, the weary waiting in his comfortless lodgings for the letter that never came. Would he have done so by her? Not to save his life a hundred times! No; she could not really have loved him. Had she not given the clearest possible proof of her indifference? Was she not another man's wife? The haughty, happy wife of an affectionate husband, willing and rich enough to indulge her in every fancy and every whim? To help her old lover with a sum of money she did not want, as you throw your dog scraps from your plate at luncheon, seemed to be the last caprice; and was her dog to take it with servile, grateful gestures, and mild, fawning eyes? Her faithful dog, once ready to face death itself willingly for one caressing wave of the white hand, one kind look in the blue eyes! No; he would be a dog indeed, if he could accept such an indignity from

the woman who had trodden his heart under foot without compunction or remorse! Stung by the thoughts, he rose from his chair, and picked the notes off the floor where they lay as Fanny had thrown them down. He would send them back to Mrs. Vandeleur that very afternoon. It would be an excuse at least for writing—only a few lines, expressing gratitude of course, but cold, polite, and with a covert bitterness in every word, that should cut her false heart to the quick! Instinctively he examined the roll and counted over the notes; with the addition of a few napoleons enclosed, the sum amounted to exactly a hundred pounds. While he told them over, a temptation came strong upon him to take them back to her himself; through much pride and sorely wounded feelings rose the old unconquerable thirst to hear that well-known voice, to look in that dear face once again—the longing that has saved many a heart from shipwreck, as it has lured many another to destruction.

There is a story in one of our ancient romances exemplifying the mastery of this ill-advised "desire of the eyes," even in extremity of mortal danger, which is not without a moral, though couched in a

grim pathetic humour of its own. Rendered into modern English, it runs almost as follows :—

"Now, the king held a tournament, and caused heralds to proclaim that at high noon the Knight of the Falcon would give battle to all comers, by sound of trumpet; to run three courses with thrust of lance, and exchange three sword strokes, point and edge, in honour of the king's betrothed bride, whom none had yet seen, for she was coming to share his throne from her father's castle beyond the Northern Sea. And if any knight would uphold that his ladye-love was aught but sun-burned in comparison with this unknown damsel, he must accept mortal defiance from the challenger, and so give him battle *à l'outrance*. Therefore, the Knight of the Falcon hung his shield under the gallery, where sat the king surrounded by his nobles and their dames; but, because it was the shield of a famous warrior, with whom issue must be tried, not by weapons of courtesy but to the death, men passed it by untouched, and it seemed that the beauty of the unknown queen would be established in a bloodless victory.

"So the heralds blew their trumpets loudly, and some of the ladies in the king's gallery whispered

that their brows must indeed be sun-burned, since their lovers had grown so sparing of lance-shaft and sword-blade; but the Lady Elinor laughed scornfully, and said to her companions, 'Behold! though my knight is under a vow, that he will neither speak in my presence, nor look in my face, till Pentecost be come and past, yet will he adventure man and horse, life and limb, to uphold mine honour this day, as ye shall see before the heralds shall have sounded one more trumpet blast.'

"Even while she spoke, Sir Eglamor, called, after his vow, 'the Silent Knight,' rode lightly into the lists, and struck his lance-point fair and free against the hanging shield till it rang again, but spake never a word the while, and though his vizor was up, kept his eyes fixed on the mailed gauntlets at his saddle-bow, because of his vow and his ladye-love, who looked down on him from the gallery above. Nevertheless, the blood came bright and glowing into his face, so that the Lady Elinor thought her knight had never seemed so fair as when he clasped his vizor and wheeled his horse to his post, and laid his lance knightly in the rest.

"So the trumpets sounded, and the knights ran three courses, shivering their lances to the grasp

without advantage lost or won on either side. Wherefore, they drew their good swords, and laid on with mighty strokes for honour and renown.

"Now the Knight of the Falcon pressed his adversary sore, and drove him to the barriers, and plied him with sweeping blade under the king's gallery; but the Silent Knight spied a crevice beneath the other's vaunt-brace, and drew back his arm to speed a deadly thrust that should win for Lady Elinor the victory.

"She was leaning over to watch him, and beholding her knight as it seemed to her thus at a disadvantage, she turned deadly pale, uttering a faint scream of pity and terror and dismay.

"Then the Silent Knight forgot his vow, and his skill of arms, and his sore need in mortal strife, to look up once again in the pale scared face he loved so well. Once again, and never more! for the whirling blade came crashing down, and shore through floating plume and good steel helmet, and bit deep into the skull, so that the Silent Knight fell heavily beneath the trampling horses; and when his squire ran in to unclasp his vizor, he neither spoke nor lifted his eyes, nor moved again.

"Said the Lady Elinor, 'Alas, for my true

knight! that even in his mortal peril he could not refrain his eyes from this poor face. Never shall it be unveiled in the sight of men again!'

"So she kept her vow till nigh Pentecost twelvemonth, and knights and dames declared that the Lady Elinor had mourned for her true love right maidenly and well."

In obedience, then, to the dictate of this morbid craving, Gerard sallied forth to traverse the gardens of the Kursaal, with the hope of seeing Mrs. Vandeleur once more. It was improbable that his search would be successful, inasmuch as the hour had arrived at which it was the habit of those visitors to go to dinner, who preserved the customs of civilised life, and felt unequal to a heavy German meal of five courses at one o'clock. He walked up one alley and down another without seeing a human being, except the tidy, prosperous, essentially Saxon maiden who presided over the Louisen-Brünnen, and whose smile was sweet, whose blue eyes were placid, as if there were no such things as aching hearts or broken fortunes in the world. She only nodded pleasantly in answer to his inquiring glances, reached him a mug of the sparkling water, and, unmoved by his refusal, went on calmly with her knitting as before.

He could not bring himself to call at Vandeleur's house and ask point-blank if Norah was at home, so he was easily persuaded she must have gone to dinner at the crowded *table-d'hôte* in the Kursaal, and there was nothing for it but to wait till that protracted meal should come to an end. He thought once of joining the two hundred feasters, but he could not have eaten a morsel to save his life. Besides—and the reflection was a little startling—he had not a farthing of money in his pocket, except that hundred of Norah's which he had resolved not to touch. So he thought he would walk to and fro amongst the poplars, and revolve what he should say to her when they did meet, conducting in his own mind an impassioned dialogue conveying sentiments of unaltered affection on both sides, based on an imaginary avowal from the lady, which it was most improbable she would make.

He was getting on remarkably well in his own opinion, and had forgotten the existence of Vandeleur, and even Fanny, as completely as if he were still Mr. Archer's pupil, speeding across the flats to Marston Rectory, when a little cloud that had gathered on the brows of the Taunus, dissolved into a gentle summer shower, before it could reach the

Maine. Not an idler but himself was out of doors, and seeing it must pass over in a few minutes, he took shelter in one of the roulette-rooms opening on the *perron* of the Kursaal.

The game, though languishing, was not without a few supporters. The ball clicked at intervals into its numbered pigeon-holes, and the drowsy voice of the croupier was to be heard with its "*rouge pair, et passe*," or its "*rien ne va plus*," in monotonous succession. A few shabby-looking players, who had dined early, or could not afford to dine at all, stalked round the table, like unquiet spirits, and the stakes were so modest that when zero turned up in favour of the bank, it only netted seventeen florins and one napoleon of doubtful metal, not much resembling gold.

With the instinct of habit, and scarce aware of what he was about, Gerard placed one of his *louis*, lately the property of Mrs. Vandeleur, on that column of the board which comprised what are termed the "middle numbers," from 13 to 25 inclusive. The ball ran into a compartment marked 17, and according to the rules of the game he won double his stake. Such encouragement to the venture of a professed gambler could have but one

result. He saw before him the possibility of winning a large stake, of returning Norah the hundred pounds she had sent him, and of assuring her, that while he was not indebted to her a farthing, she had been his good angel and had preserved him from utter penury and want. A second hazard was equally successful, and Gerard cast himself blindly into the arms of that goddess in whom he had lately accustomed himself implicitly to trust. She failed him, as she so often fails her votaries, when they have none to rely on but herself. After an hour of gnawing anxiety and suspense, that left its traces on his features months afterwards, Gerard for the second time within a few hours walked out upon the *perron* literally beggared to the uttermost farthing. Nay, worse than this; he had lost more than food and shelter, more than the necessaries of life. How could he ever look Mrs. Vandeleur in the face again?

His eyes vacant and abstracted, face bloodless, hands thrust deep into empty pockets, coat buttoned, and hat pushed back, he walked with something of a drunkard's wavering step and gesture in the direction of his home. There seems implanted in human nature that instinct of the wild animal

which prompts the hopeless, helpless sufferer to seek its own lair, there to lie down and die. Gerard Ainslie staggered back to his "apartment of four pieces" aimlessly and unconsciously, as the hurt wolf slinks to its den, or the sinking fox makes for the woodland in which he was bred. It was not till his hand touched the door that another pang came across him, as he remembered his wife, and wondered "what he should say to Fanny!"

He had forgotten their late difference now—forgotten her irritating ways, her want of refinement in manner—forgotten even her low birth and his own lost chances—forgotten everything but that she had beauty, and loved him, and had fought gallantly by his side through the ups and downs of their short married life; nay, that even now she would not offer a reproach, but would probably try to please him more than ever, because he was completely undone. She had courage, he remembered; she had energy and resource, but what plan could she hit upon now? or how should he excuse the imbecile recklessness and folly of this last fatal proceeding?

Poor Gerard! He need not have troubled himself on that score. Entering the sitting-room, he

could not fail to observe that the box which contained Fanny's favourite finery was absent from its accustomed corner. There was no work on the sofa, and no work-basket, while the fan she usually left by the flower-stand had disappeared; but on the table lay a letter, addressed to himself, in the clear, formal handwriting he had often jested with her for taking so much pains to acquire. I think he knew the truth before he opened it. I think amongst all the mingled feelings called up by its perusal, one of thankfulness for a sense of liberty predominated. It was short, frank enough in all conscience, and very much to the point.

"I have quitted you," it told him, "once for all. I am never coming back again, and will never ask to see you any more. Gerard, I wouldn't have gone like this if I hadn't left you something to keep you from starving. I feel bad enough; don't think me worse than I am. And I wouldn't have deserted you at all, only you don't love me!—that's enough, I'm not a-going to say another word. Perhaps I'd have made you a good wife if you'd behaved different; but I don't bear malice. I'd say 'God bless you!' if I thought a blessing of mine could

do anybody anything but harm. Good-bye, Gerard! I hope you'll be happier some day with somebody else than you've ever been with me.

"FANNY."

So Gerard found himself without a wife, without friends, without money; outraged, insulted, ruined, lonely, desolate—but free.

CHAPTER VII.

DISAGREEABLE.

It is time to return to Mr. Vandeleur, who, like most men of his age, considered dinner no unimportant item in the day's programme, and protested vigorously against anything being suffered to interfere with that important function. It is only very young people, I imagine, who boast they can live upon love—though how so light a diet supplies the wants of a growing appetite, I am at a loss to comprehend. John Vandeleur could still find pleasure in the glance of a bright eye, the accents of a sweet voice; yet was he none the less susceptible to the fascinations of four courses and a dessert, washed down by a bottle of Mumm's champagne, if no better could be got, a cup of clear coffee, and a *chasse* of curaçoa. The humours of a *table-d'hôte* also amused him not a little, provided he had somebody to join

in his mirth; and he was very proud of the admiring glances elicited by Norah's handsome face and figure from *connoisseurs* of various nations, when she entered a crowded *salle* to take her place at the long glittering table, with its glass, fruit, flowers, trumpery, and tinsel, all exceedingly pleasing to the eye. Moreover, he was hungry after his walk on the Taunus, therefore he waited impatiently in the sitting-room for five or ten minutes, ere he went and tapped at his wife's door.

Mrs. Vandeleur, knowing her red eyelids would not bear inspection, had locked herself in. "Who's there?" she demanded sharply, from inside.

"We shall be very late," he said, "if you're not ready. Hadn't I better order dinner at home?"

She longed for an hour's quiet. She thirsted for ever so short a space of time to herself, to do battle with, and gain the mastery over, her own heart; so she answered a little impatiently—

"I'm not coming—I don't want any dinner—I'm not hungry. Go on, and never mind me."

"No dinner, Norah?" replied her husband, in a tone of surprise and concern. "Are you not well, darling? Can't I get you anything? Shall I send after Von Saufenkelch—I saw him pass just now?"

Her heart smote her sore. Why couldn't she love him? He was so kind and considerate; so anxious if she was ill, so forbearing when she was cross. Though ungovernable with others, he was always a gentleman to her. And she could scarce return him even common gratitude for his devotion. She forced herself to speak in terms of kindness and affection.

"Don't be anxious, dear," she answered, without rising from the bed on which she lay. "I'm only tired, and I have got a little headache. An hour's quiet will take it away. Go to dinner without me; I shall be all right when you come back."

But she shuddered, and turned her wet face to the pillows, while his step died out along the passage. Could she go on bearing this? Must it always be thus? Was her whole life to be a lie?

Then she thanked Heaven that she had been able to help Gerard at his need, and made a firm resolution never to see him, nor hear from him, nor so much as even *think* of him again, and prayed that strength might be given her to keep it till the end.

John Vandeleur, a little disappointed, walked off to feed with two hundred of his fellow-creatures at the crowded *table-d'hôte* of the Kursaal. A knot of French women, vivacious in language and

agreeable in manners, looked after him with approving glances as he passed, considering him, no doubt, a creditable specimen of the middle-aged, manly, well-dressed English gentleman; and one even observed, loud enough for him to overhear, "*Tiens! Coralie, il est bien, ce vieillard. Pour un Anglais bien entendu!*" To which Coralie, whose teeth would bear inspection, only replied by a sarcastic grin.

Something seemed to be gnawing at his heart though, while he threaded the crowds of well-dressed, handsome women who were thronging towards the *table-d'hôte;* something that would keep reminding him how the path he had elected to follow was slipping from beneath his feet; how the life he had chosen was passing away, to leave nothing but a vague impotent regret in its place. Once, not so long ago, he would have enjoyed such a scene, as the butterfly enjoys the summer-garden where it may disport itself at will. Now he could not even wish that time would come again. Like the mortal in fairy-land whose eyes had been touched with a magic liquid that rendered powerless the elfin glamour, he seemed to see gaunt skeletons and grinning skulls beneath winning

smiles and graceful, undulating dresses. He had come up with the *mirage* at last, and discovered that those golden lakes and gardens of Paradise were but barren sand and scorching glare. Was there only one fountain to quench his insufferable thirst, and must that be sealed to him for evermore? His brain swam, and he turned sick and cold, but the man had lots of pluck, and soon rallied—swaggering into the long lofty *salle* with his accustomed air of easy good-humoured superiority, though he said to himself he was "about done" all the same.

"I've been through everything else," thought Vandeleur, "but I've never taken to drinking. I used to think fellows fools who did. Well, I'm learning some queer lessons now. Perhaps it's the only thing left after all!"

Nevertheless, he was so loyal to his young wife, shut up weeping in her room, that he went and sat by old Lady Baker, who usually found a vacant place at her elbow—something in her brown wig and general demeanour deterring strangers from a near approach, until compelled to face that ordeal by the pangs of hunger and the exigencies of a crowded table.

"Where's Norah? Why didn't you bring her?"

asked this tiresome old woman in the loud voice deaf people, as being mindful of the golden rule, seem invariably to use.

"Got a headache," answered Vandeleur in the same key, arranging his napkin, and commencing on a plate of thick vermicelli soup.

"Headache! Nonsense!" answered Lady Baker, and by this time their stentorian colloquy had raised some score of heads on each side of the table from the congenial employment of eating, while Vandeleur wished he was sitting anywhere else. "That's only the waters. I tell you the Louisen-Brünnen would give my poodle a headache if it was to do him any good. Why didn't you make her come? What's the use of your marrying a young wife if you don't take her about and amuse her? She looks moped to death. What's that? Beef? *Merci*, no thank ye. Mr. Vandeleur, will you hand me the *Wein-karte?*"

Vandeleur had ordered a bottle of champagne. While Lady Baker wavered between the merits of Beaune and Medoc, he had time to fortify himself with a glass or two of that exhilarating compound, but his communicative neighbour was soon at him again.

"Tell Norah I've such a piece of news for her," she shouted in his ear: "I've seen her old love on the terrace. It's as true as I sit here. And he is playing, I can tell you, as if his pockets were lined with gold. You remember young Ainslie, the lad who was at Mr. Archer's, not above two miles from Oakover?"

Remember young Ainslie! He rather thought he did; and the recollection scarce improved the flavour of that last gulp of champagne ere he filled again so rapidly. But John Vandeleur was a match for a good many Lady Bakers still, and he laughed carelessly while he replied—

"Playing is he? That won't last long. I'm sorry for it. I used to think him a nice boy, and he was a great favourite of Norah's; but I'm afraid he's gone regularly to the bad."

"You may well say so," proclaimed Lady Baker; "I can tell you more than that; I can tell you what's become of that odious woman he married. I can tell you who she's gone off with. Ah! it's a sad business. A'n't you dying to know?"

Here an English mamma, with two gaunt daughters not out of ear-shot, half rose from her seat, as about to take refuge in flight; but observing the

approach of a tempting *soufflé*, and unwilling, perhaps, to lose the germ of a flagrant scandal, contented herself with frowning in a rebuking manner at her offspring, and remaining very upright in her place.

Lady Baker continued:—

"I never thought much of that Count Tourbillon, you know. I told you myself you shouldn't introduce him to your wife, and I'm thankful now I did. Well, I sent my maid out, before I went to dress, for half a yard of sarsnet. Will you believe, Mr. Vandeleur, that there wasn't such a thing to be got as half a yard of sarsnet, without writing to Frankfort for it! And what do you think she saw?"

"The Frankfort omnibus empty," answered Vandeleur, refilling his glass, "and the English clergyman's children in a donkey-chair! that's about the usual excitement here."

"Nonsense," replied her ladyship; "you can see that any day. No; what my maid saw was a fiacre, loaded with luggage, and driven towards the railway-station, with a foreign servant on the box, and inside Count Tourbillon, accompanied by"—here the English mamma stretched her long neck to listen, while her demure daughters coloured

with suppressed delight—"by Mrs. Ainslie! There, Mr. Vandeleur! Have I opened your eyes, or have I not?"

If she had, Vandeleur was most unlikely to admit it. Calling for a glass of Madeira he answered calmly—

"What a good riddance for Ainslie! Now the weight is taken off, it is just possible he may get a fresh start, and make a race of it after all."

"That's so like a man!" answered her ladyship with a grim smile, and a playful shake of her brown wig; "you never think of *us*. Have you no pity for the poor woman who has fallen into the hands of your friend? Yes; your friend, that good-for-nothing Count Tourbillon?"

Vandeleur's laugh was harsh and grating. "Pity!" replied he; "who that knows anything about them ever pitied *a woman!* Like the tiger-cat, they can take care of themselves. Tourbillon understands them thoroughly. He wages war with the whole sex—war to the knife!—and he's quite right. I'll tell you what, Lady Baker; I'll pity *you* if ever you fall into his clutches, but nobody else. *Garçon! Encore un verre de madère!*"

He spoke in a loud, almost a brutal tone, quite

unlike his usual voice, and even Lady Baker's dull senses perceived the difference. She looked a little surprised, while the English mamma, with a sign to her daughters, walked grandly and reproachfully away. To be sure, dinner was over and there was nothing to stay for now; nor could she expect to hear so good a piece of scandal during the next twenty-four hours. Was it not her duty, therefore, to impart it without delay, to certain female friends of her own nation, with whom she was engaged to a British cup of tea, while the rest of the company went to drink coffee outside, where they could sit in the glow of the warm evening and enjoy the strains of such a band as is never heard out of doors but in Germany?

Vandeleur lit a cigar, and took his place to listen, but the sweet, sad, wailing melody of the waltz they were playing irritated him strangely, and seemed to call up all kinds of morbid uncomfortable feelings in his mind. He had become very restless of late, and seldom remained long in any one spot. He thought he would walk about a little, while he finished his cigar, unwilling to inflict its fumes on Norah and her headache, yet anxious to return home without delay.

So he wandered amongst the poplar alleys to kill time, and presently found himself in front of the stall at which his wife had made so bad a bargain that same afternoon.

He remembered she had praised some beads seen in a shop-window as they passed through Frankfort, but which they had no time to stop and purchase. Perhaps he might find something of the same kind here. Puffing at his cigar, he glanced his eye lazily over the counter in search of what he required.

Suddenly the colour rose to his brow, and he turned on the German Jew who presided over this emporium, with an energy that made the little man shrink in his shoes.

"Where did you get this?" he asked, pointing to the bracelet he had himself placed on Norah's arm some three months before.

The dealer hesitated, stammered, and could not remember of course. He had so many customers, so much business, he never refused to bargain. The high and well-born gentleman was obviously a man of taste. If he liked the bracelet he could have it cheap, very cheap. It was worth three thousand florins, but he desired the gentleman's custom.

He would take what it had cost him, and the gentleman should have it for twenty-five hundred, if he would buy something else. There was a pearl necklace in the back-shop, and a set of turquoise buttons made for the Grand Duchess herself.

Vandeleur threw away his cigar and took the bracelet out of the other's hand for a nearer inspection. During the space of a moment he turned very pale. It was scarce possible, he thought, that two trinkets could have been made so exactly alike; but he soon determined to set his doubts at rest.

"Twenty-five hundred florins!" said he. "You might as well ask twenty-five millions! I will give you two thousand. That was what the bracelet cost in London, and you will make at least fifty per cent. profit, as you know."

"Not a gulden, not a kreutzer, not a poor half-groschen!" protested the Jew. On the contrary, he would be out of pocket by the transaction. Such dealings would ruin him, would shut up his shop, would cause him to become a bankrupt. Nevertheless, to oblige this English nobleman he would even risk such a catastrophe. But the English nobleman would not forget him, and would deal with him while he remained in Homburg for jewel-

lery, amber, shawls, beads, crystals, porcelain, embroidery, and tobacco. Nay, he could even be of use for cashing bills on well-known houses in London or Paris. More, and here he looked exceedingly amiable, if his excellency required any temporary advance at a low rate of interest, he would feel proud to be of service. This in many different languages, with bows, and shrugs, and apologetic wavings of the hands.

Vandeleur cut them all short with some impatience. Producing his cheque-book, he bought the bracelet at once, and, without permitting it even to be packed, insisted on carrying it away in his hand, glancing on it from time to time with a wild disturbed gaze, while he hurried home.

Mrs. Vandeleur's headache was better. She had drunk a cup of coffee, and come down to the drawing-room. Pocketing his purchase, her husband joined her there with a clouded brow.

"Norah," said he, "I got you a bracelet at London and Ryder's, some weeks ago. I saw you wearing it yesterday. Just send your maid for it, please. I met her on the stairs."

Mrs. Vandeleur turned white. "What do you want it for?" she asked, with a vague idea of gaining time.

He never looked at her,—he seldom did; but though she could not catch his eye, she dreaded the expression of his countenance, while he answered, very slowly—

"I have a particular reason for wishing to look at the stones. I think I have seen one to match it exactly. Will you ring at once?"

Her courage seldom failed her long. It was coming back rapidly. She raised her proud little head and looked full in his face.

"No; I will not!" replied Norah. "My maid could not bring it me, because she hasn't got it."

"You had it on this morning at breakfast," said he, still in the same low, concentrated voice.

"I—I've lost it," she replied. "No! I won't tell you a story about it, Mr. Vandeleur. I—I sold it three hours ago to a German Jew, for a hundred pounds."

"You sold it to a German Jew for a hundred pounds!" he repeated. "I know you did. I bought it back again for two. Cent. per cent. is the least of the loss when ladies do such things without consulting their husbands. Mrs. Vandeleur, may I ask what use you have made of the hundred pounds thus obtained in so creditable a

manner to you and me? You may tell me or not. But depend upon it I shall find this out as I did the other."

She had caught his eye now, and he could not look away from her, though he tried. Shifting his position uneasily, he seemed to abandon the superiority he had assumed. She felt her advantage, and it gave her confidence to speak the truth with a haughty front.

"You may find out what you please," said she. "There is nothing to conceal. I sent the money to Mr. Ainslie, who is ruined, and in the utmost want. I believe he is actually starving. You won't frighten me, Mr. Vandeleur. I should do the same thing again."

She spoke boldly, but she was frightened none the less; and something told her, though she could not explain why, that the only way in which she controlled him was by keeping her eye fixed on his. It seemed to be with sheer passion that his features worked so painfully, and she sprang to her feet as he drew near, believing for a moment that he would have struck her with his clenched hand.

The sudden movement broke the charm with which she had fixed him, and he burst forth in a

torrent of reproaches, insult, and vehement abuse. He did not indeed threaten her with the personal violence she had feared, for even in these moments of uncontrollable anger Vandeleur retained some of the gentlemanlike instincts which had become second nature, but she spoke to her in language such as she had never heard before,—such as, to do him justice, he had never spoken to a woman in his life. Pale, tearful, trembling, but still undaunted, Norah retired as soon as practicable to her own room, where she was suffered to remain undisturbed; but long after she had locked herself in, and composed herself, as she hoped, for rest, even till far into the night, she lay quaking and miserable, listening to her husband's voice rating the unfortunate servants, and giving many directions as to packing luggage, railway-trains, fiacres, and other premonitory symptoms of an early start.

Norah could only gather that they were to take their departure the following morning from Homburg, and it was with a weary, aching heart she told herself it mattered little to her how far, or in what direction, they were to go.

CHAPTER VIII.

DESPOTIC.

SINCE we met them at a certain wedding-breakfast to celebrate the success of Mr. Vandeleur's wooing, we have lost sight of two characters indispensable to the progress of our story. It is not to be supposed that Dolly Egremont and Dandy Burton, having quitted the shelter of their tutor's roof, retired therefore into the privacy of domestic life. On the contrary, each of these gentlemen considered himself now launched forth upon the great world, and was perfectly convinced of his own ability to tread a stage whereon success appears so easy to people, till they try. Burton, indeed, passed a sufficiently creditable examination, thanks to the care with which Mr. Archer had crammed him, and his own faculty of retaining special information in

his head for a limited period. He was, therefore, now chiefly anxious about his speedy appointment to Her Majesty's Household Cavalry, and pending the welcome intelligence, looked for in each succeeding *Gazette*, threw his whole mind into the congenial subjects of boots, leathers, helmets, cuirasses, and such warlike panoply, not to mention chargers, grand in action, faultless in shape, black in colour, or of a dark brown as far removed from black as the Colonel's critical eye would permit. Such interests as these left but little room in the Dandy's brains for anything of lighter importance; nevertheless it *did* occur to him that, although his manners were incapable of improvement, his curiosity might be agreeably stimulated by a light course of continental travel. And, finding the French he had been taught at Eton and elsewhere of little use in Paris, where the natives speak their own language in a mode astounding to English faculties, he wandered aimlessly on as his foreign servant advised, and after drinking *Epernay* at Chalons-sur-Marne, and hearing the clock strike in Strasburg Cathedral, found himself at Heidelberg, very much bored, and half persuaded that he had now done sight-seeing enough, and might go home with a clear con-

science, *viâ* Brussels, Antwerp, and Ostend. To be in a foreign country ignorant of the language (for Burton knew about as much German as most young English gentlemen who have had the advantages of a liberal education, and could ask for a "*weiss-caffee*" or a "*Kalbs-cotelette*," but little else), to feel dependent for society on your own thoughts, and for information on a servant with earrings and a velvet cap, in whose intelligence you have more confidence than in his honesty, is a situation that soon becomes irksome, not to say distressing.

Dandy Burton came down to breakfast the morning after his arrival at Heidelberg with a fixed determination to *do* the Castle, the Great Tun, and other curiosities of that picturesque old town, in the forenoon, and start for England after an early dinner and a bottle of the only drinkable Rhine wine he had yet been able to find out. Having finished his coffee, he was lighting the indispensable cigar, when a heavy hand clapped him on the shoulder, and a cheery voice, recalling the pupil-room at Archer's, accosted him in accents of extreme delight,—

"What, Dandy! *Our* Dandy! In the Fatherland,—in the heart of the Black Forest! In the

very Paradise of singing, and smoke, and sentiment, and scenery! Pst! Waiter! *Kellner!* Beer. *Bairische Bier, Ich bitte — Geschwind!* — Look sharp! On the banks of the Neckar, you must keep up your pecker. What a jolly go! Old man, I'm very glad to see you."

Dolly's jovial round face denoted, indeed, the cordiality he felt. Stout, ruddy, sunburnt, with long hair and budding moustaches, dressed, moreover, in an indescribable costume, combining the peculiarities of every country through which he had passed, and surmounted by a Tyrolese hat, he might have been taken for a Dutch pedlar, a Belgian bagman, an Alsatian bandmaster, a horse-dealer from the Banat, a German student, or anything in the world but a young Englishman of position, the habitual associate of so unimpeachable a swell as Dandy Burton.

The latter, however, returned his greeting well pleased.

"When did you come?" he asked, "and how long do you stay? I say, we'll do this beastly place together. I thought of going back to-night. I don't mind if I give it another day now. What have you been about since we met at Oakover?"

Dolly buried his broad face in the mug of beer placed before him, and set it down half emptied, with a deep sigh, ere he replied.

"Plucked like a goose, my young friend! Ploughed like an acre of turnips! Spun like a humming-top or a tee-to-tum! The foe may thunder at the gates now, Dandy. My bleeding country must look to me in vain. 'Like Caius of Corioli, my vengeance and my wrongs may furnish food for ribald mirth, and after-dinner songs.' But when the trumpet note of defiance is heard without the walls, you must answer it on your own hook, my boy; you'll have no help from me. And all because I spelt baggage-waggon with too many g's, and couldn't tell my examiner the population, constitution, or hereditary policy of Hesse-Darmstadt."

"Then you're not going to be a soldier after all!" observed Burton in a tone of much commiseration.

"No, I'm *not*," replied Dolly. "And, to tell you the truth, I'm very glad of it. I saw a two-hundred pound shot the other day, and an eighteen-inch iron plating that ought to have resisted it, but didn't! I'm a pretty fair 'long-stop,' as you know, but I think I'd rather not field them, when they come in so sharp as that. I'll tell you what I'll do

though, Dandy, for love of the profession;—come and admire you the first day you're on a guard of honour, when there's a levee at St. James's. Have some beer, old chap, and then walk up to the castle with me."

So the two friends strolled through the town without meeting a single student, much to their disappointment; for even the Dandy, whose powers of admiration were limited, had conceived an interest in that picturesque assemblage of unwise young men. He had heard—who has not?—of their associations, their discussions, their duels, their drinking-bouts, their affectations of dress and deportment, their loyalty to one another, and to the brotherhood of which each was so proud to form a part. He would have liked to become better acquainted with a society, than which nothing can be conceived more different from the undergraduates at Oxford and Cambridge, or the subalterns in our own regiments of cavalry.

As for Dolly, he was wild about them. So he was about the town, and the castle, and the Black Forest, and the silver Neckar winding through its half-dried bed, in which huge boulders of rock denoted the force of the river when coming down with a

winter's flood; also about the Wolfen-brünnen, famous for its improbable legend, which he related to his companion at great length, with many interpolations and additions of his own. Altogether the Dandy felt he had passed a fatiguing day, when they returned to the old castle, and, leaning against its battlements, took their fill once more of a panorama of beauty, such as no man who has once seen it can ever forget, such as could rouse even so imperturbable a young gentleman as Burton into exclamations of satisfaction and approval.

"It's very well done indeed!" observed that critic, flinging the end of his cigar down some hundred fathoms of sheer descent, "and if anything could repay such a broil, and such a climb, it would be a view like this! If it wasn't for his boots a fellow might almost fancy he was a bird up here. Mightn't he, Dolly? I don't envy those two though, down below, having it all before them. The woman is tired already. Look how she lags behind!"

But Dolly did not answer. With all his buffoonery, nay, perhaps in consequence of the comic element in his character, he had keen sensibilities for the grand, the beautiful, or the pathetic.

There were tears in his eyes now, dimming the golden sparkle of the sunshine on the river, blurring the outline of that far horizon where endless ranges of the Black Forest joined the bright summer sky.

He gulped them down though, heartily ashamed, and looked in the same direction as his companion.

"Better and better!" he exclaimed, his face brightening. "Why, it's Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur! Let's go down and meet them."

They descended without delay. Half-way down the hill they met husband and wife, no longer arm-in-arm, or side-by-side, as people walk whose ideas are in common, or whose hearts answer each other, but several yards apart. Vandeleur looking on the ground, moody, sullen, abstracted, muttering at intervals to himself. Norah, paler even than common, marching far behind him with the stately step and downcast air, yet unsubdued, of a captive in a procession. Every now and then he would stop for her, speak a few common-place words in a cold constrained tone more suggestive of displeasure than the loudest reproof, and move on again without waiting for an answer, as if forgetful of her presence. For the first time since her marriage, Norah was

to learn the nature of the yoke under which she had put her neck, the fetters into which she had thrust her feet.

Truth to tell, Mrs. Vandeleur was a good deal frightened. Though of a courageous temperament, last night's outbreak had made no slight impression on her nerves. Since then she had watched her husband's demeanour, as the landsman watches an approaching storm at sea, ignorant alike of how it is to be met, how terrific may be its fury, and how soon it may break. She had no experience in such matters. No male voice had ever spoken to her before but in accents of kindliness, courtesy, even deference. How was she to encounter bitter taunts, savage threats, unfounded reproaches from the man she had sworn to love, honour, and obey!

He had not been to bed the previous night, but had entered her room at daybreak, and desired her to make ready at once for departure. Worn and sleepless, she had obeyed without a question. At intervals he broke out against her with confused half-spoken accusations, to which she thought it better not to reply, although her very silence furnished him with a fresh grievance. He seemed continually on the point of saying something which

would not out, of taking some desperate step from which he felt himself restrained without knowing why, and poor Norah quaked to think that at any moment this invisible thread might break, this imaginary safeguard be destroyed.

Under such uncomfortable conditions they entered the carriage which brought them to the railway, and it was only by accident Norah gathered that Heidelberg was to be her destination for the night. Once she ventured to inquire if he was going to take her to England, and Vandeleur, the same Vandeleur whom hitherto she had looked upon, with all his faults, as the perfection of a courteous gentleman, replied—

"You will go wherever I choose—so long as you call yourself my wife! If you think I can't keep you clear of that blackguard Ainslie in England as well as Germany, you will find yourself most infernally mistaken. Hold your tongue!"

After this she thought it better to ask no more questions, but what an interminable journey it seemed! Arrived at Heidelberg they sat down to a second breakfast, or an early luncheon,—it was all the same to Norah, for she could scarcely force a morsel down her throat; and entering a carriage

according to Vandeleur's desire, expressed in few words and those none of the kindest, this ill-matched pair proceeded to view the town ere they alighted for a walk up the hill towards the castle, silent as I have said, preoccupied, and twenty yards apart. I question if either of them had eyes for the glowing landscape, the wide immensity of water, wood, and wold they had ostensibly travelled so many leagues to see.

Unlike those which precede matrimony, such conjugal *tête-à-têtes* are exceedingly tedious to the performers. The commonest acquaintance who breaks in on them is welcomed as a deliverer and a friend. A few weeks ago, perhaps, the same individual would have been received with black looks, short answers, and a manifest disinclination to detain him from any other business he might have on hand. Vandeleur's countenance cleared and his whole manner changed when the two young men met him half-way down the hill. Norah, too, came to the front, and, with the noble instinct of woman that bids her draw the folds of her mantle to conceal her wounds, entered into the usual light laughing conversation with which people think it decent to veil all emotion, whether of joy or sorrow, from their companions.

So the young men turned back, and the whole party went together up the hill, and together visited the curiosities of the castle, ridiculing, even while they felt it most deeply, all the romance, all the interest of the grand old keep. As extremes meet, so the highest-cultured conceal their emotion not less sternly than the immovable savage; and there are few phases of contradictory human nature more amusing than the cold sarcastic mirth with which an exquisite sensibility thinks it necessary to hide its most creditable feelings. Look along the stalls at any of our theatres while a pathetic scene is being enacted, and watch how stealthily people blow their noses in its most touching parts. Perhaps some bearded warrior, who has fronted death scores of times, and fancies himself above all moral or physical weaknesses, will rather tell a deliberate falsehood than acknowledge a generous sympathy, and excuses his watery eyes by pleading a cold in the head!

Vandeleur was popular with young men. His air of good-humoured recklessness won on their fancy, and his reputation of having "done everything" was not without its charm for those who fondly thought they had got it all to do. He chatted with

them in his old pleasant manner, and even altered his demeanour towards his wife. Norah looked at him in mute surprise. This, too, was a new phase in the character which she thought she had learned after a few months. Gradually her own spirits returned, for youth is very elastic and easily stimulated by such restoratives as scenery and sunshine. She, too, began to laugh and talk, showing frankly enough that she was pleased to meet her old friends in this remote foreign town.

When Vandeleur asked them both to dinner at his hotel in little more than an hour's time, she endorsed her husband's invitation so cordially that he ground his teeth in a pang of unfounded jealousy, and the Dandy, who was apt to be sanguine on such matters, felt persuaded that he had at last made a favourable impression on Mrs. Vandeleur.

"She's tired of him already, Dolly," said he, while they climbed the lofty staircase that led to their bedrooms; "and I'm not surprised. What right had such an old buffer to marry the prettiest girl in the whole county? You may take your oath now she wishes she had waited for somebody else!"

"Meaning you, I suppose," replied Dolly. "No, no, my boy. Don't you believe it. There never

was a nicer girl out than Miss Welby—there isn't a better woman on earth than Mrs. Vandeleur. She deserves to be happy, and I hope and trust she is."

Nevertheless, discreet Dolly, entertaining a sincere friendship for the lady of whom he spoke so highly, was not half as well satisfied of her welfare as he pretended to be. He whistled softly to himself the whole time he was dressing, and shook his head at intervals with a whimsical air of apprehension and concern. Nay, while he put the finishing touch to his toilet by tying round his neck the narrow piece of tape that did duty for a white cravat, he broke out aloud into one of the misquotations in which he habitually indulged.

"She's been bewitched," said Dolly. "Poor girl! Regularly bewitched, and though she has discovered it so soon, it's too late.

> "Out flew the web, and floated wide,
> The mirror cracked from side to side,
> 'The curse is come upon me!' cried
> The Lady of Shalott;
> 'I promised him I'd be his bride,
> And now I'd rather not!'"

CHAPTER IX.

DANGEROUS.

It is only his due to observe that John Vandeleur was one of those gentlemen who, if they intended going up in a balloon, would take care to have it warmed, aired, and made thoroughly comfortable.

He was, indeed, well used to travelling on the Continent, and knew better than most people with how little extra forethought and trouble it is possible for those who have plenty of money to carry with them all the luxuries of home. He employed a foreign servant, too, — a perfect treasure, who suffered nobody to rob his master but himself. A servant to whom he need only say, "We start to-morrow at five for Constantinople," and everything would be ready at daybreak, including, perhaps, a Sultan's firman waiting at the first post he should

reach on the Turkish frontier. To whom, as on the present occasion, he had but to observe, "Auguste, dinner in half-an-hour! Covers for four!" and Auguste would reply, "Milor (he persisted in calling his master "Milor") shall be served to the minute!" taking care, at the same time, even in a greasy German hotel, that the dinner should be as well put on the table, if not as well cooked, the wine as carefully iced, as at Oakover, or the Clarendon, or the Café de Paris itself. When the two guests were ushered by this invaluable domestic into the sitting-room occupied by their host and hostess, these were ready to receive them: Vandeleur, gentlemanlike and hospitable, as if in his own house; Norah, pale and beautiful, in a high transparent dress that set off the symmetry of her neck and shoulders to perfection, her only ornaments a heavy gold bracelet at her wrist, a heavy gold locket on a black velvet round her neck, and a white rose in her dark chestnut hair.

The husband was laughing gaily; the wife looked tranquil and composed. How could the arrivals guess that there had been another scene not ten minutes ago?—that the smiling gentleman extending his hand so cordially to the two young men had been swearing brutally at the delicate lady to

whom they made their bow, accusing her of flirting with the one and valuing the society of the other, as being a dear friend to her lover—hers, a married woman!—but a lover whom he would take d——d good care she should never see again! All this, with strange mutterings, furious gestures, and averted eyes that never looked a moment in her face.

Well, he was pleasant enough now. It was, "Mr. Burton, will you take in my wife? Let me see, which of you two fellows is the eldest? Never mind. Dolly, you will come with me. I can't give you a decent dinner, but the wine is not bad, and after our broiling walk to-day we shall appreciate it. I thought Norah would have fainted, she looked so knocked up when she came in."

Mrs. Vandeleur smiled rather contemptuously, and the party sat down, waited on by Auguste and a benevolent German servant, who appeared to resist with difficulty his desire to join in the conversation.

They talked about England of course. English people always do talk as if they were within ten miles of Charing Cross. Burton endeavoured to interest Mrs. Vandeleur in his own anticipations of the London season, and she tried to listen as if

her thoughts were not far away. Dolly reverted to old times, to the Rectory, to Ripley Water, to the pupil-room at Archer's, and her eye brightened, while the colour came faintly to her cheek. "He liked that country," he said, "he liked that neighbourhood, he admired the scenery, he enjoyed the climate, he thought Oakover the nicest place he had ever seen."

"I wish you could persuade Mrs. Vandeleur of all that," said the host, who seemed, contrary to his usual habit, inclined to grow quarrelsome and argumentative. "It's a devilish odd thing—though when you're as old as I am you'll both have seen a thousand instances of it—that no woman ever likes to live at her husband's place. It's either too high or too low, or the trees are too near the house, or there's standing water within half a mile that makes it unhealthy. There never are any neighbours. It's dull in the summer and cold in the winter. Or, suppose all these objections are got over, it's sure to be too damp for her constitution in the spring."

"I like Oakover very much," observed Mrs. Vandeleur, quietly; "and as for the climate not agreeing with me, I was brought up within two miles of it, as you know."

"Oh, you're a pattern wife, of course," was his answer, with so unpleasant a smile that it could not escape the observation of his guests. "It's lucky you do like the place though, for we go straight back there to-morrow, I can tell you."

The young men looked at each other in consternation. Vandeleur's manner was so different from his usual easy good-humoured courtesy, that they were puzzled. He was drinking a great deal of wine too, and seemed strangely impatient when Auguste neglected to fill his glass. Even after dinner was over he continued at table, and appeared in no hurry to order coffee. Norah, unwilling to remain, and afraid to go away, sat in utter discomfort, trying to fix her attention on the platitudes of Dandy Burton, who bestowed them liberally, satisfied he was kindling a lively interest in the breast of his handsome hostess. The latter looked all the while to good-natured Dolly Egremont as her mainstay, feeling a certain protection in his presence while he remained, for something told her he would prove a true and loyal friend, but dreading to be left alone with her husband when it should be time for their guests to go away. Fear, however, in the female breast is seldom unaccompanied

by the nobler emotion of anger. If her *physique* be equal to it, a high-spirited woman, like a high-couraged horse, is never so daring as when her nerves are excited by well-founded apprehension. Norah was conscious of terror, but her soul rose in rebellion against the unworthy and uncomfortable feeling, and she felt, to carry on the equine metaphor, that one more jerk of the bridle, one more dig from the brutal spur, would get her head up, and rouse her to face anything in the world.

The silence grew irksome; Dandy Burton, wishing to break it, stumbled on the happy topic of Gerard Ainslie. With characteristic felicity he asked point-blank whether his host had heard or seen anything of his fellow-pupil since he left Mr. Archer's?

Vandeleur grinned maliciously at his wife.

"I'm sorry you've inquired," said he. "I ought to tell you all about him. I ought to warn you against him. We left him at Homburg literally begging his bread." Dolly half rose from his chair, as if to be off that moment by the train for Frankfort, and I think Mrs. Vandeleur liked him none the worse for this sudden movement, which she probably understood. "You need not pity him; neither of you. He has done everything that

is bad. He has turned out a thorough blackguard. No lady ought even to mention his name. He can never look a gentleman in the face again."

Dolly had got as far as "It's impossible!" when he was silenced by Mrs. Vandeleur.

"You dare not say it to his face!" exclaimed Norah, flushing crimson and turning very pale again in a moment; "and it is cowardly to say it behind his back. Yes, cowardly, Mr. Vandeleur, and unworthy of a man! Mr. Ainslie has been unfortunate, more unfortunate than I can describe; but I tell you, and I tell these old friends of his, that I will not believe a word you say against him; that whatever may have been his follies, he has never been guilty of a low or a mean action, and I will pledge all I have in the world that his sense of honour is as high and as untarnished as my own."

With a bow to be divided between her guests, and a stare of haughty defiance for her husband's exclusive benefit, with head up, measured gait, proud gestures, and sweeping draperies, Mrs. Vandeleur marched out of the room and disappeared.

Burton and Egremont looked in each other's faces aghast. Vandeleur became almost purple, but recovered himself creditably enough, and burst out into a forced laugh.

"Bachelors both!" said he, pushing a bottle of claret across the table, "if you're wise, you'll remain so. Ladies have their *tantrums*, as you'll probably find out some day. Mrs. Vandeleur isn't at all well just at present. There's no end of steel in those waters at Homburg, and this air is much too bracing; that is why I am taking her to England. Have some more claret, and then we'll smoke a quiet weed before we part."

In common decency the guests were obliged to remain a little longer, but the claret seemed flavourless, the conversation flagged, and, after a cup of coffee, they were only too happy to take their departure.

As they threaded the long corridor of the hotel, Dolly whispered to his friend—

"We've spent a deuced unpleasant evening, to my mind, and I'm sorry for it. You can't call that a 'dinner of herbs,' my boy. Well, matrimony's a noble institution, no doubt; but what we've seen to-day is discouraging, and I don't feel the better for it."

"What can you expect?" answered the other. "He's much too old for her, and she hates him. How handsome she looked when she walked out!

Let us go and smoke in the court, Dolly. It is cool there, and a beautiful starlight night."

So the two went down into the courtyard, surrounded on three sides by the hotel, and on the fourth by the stables. It wanted still some hours of midnight, and even the honest early German folks had not yet retired to rest. Lights were gleaming from many of the windows, standing open to let in the fresh night-air. Dolly and Burton, smoking their cigars, wondered lazily which were those of Mrs. Vandeleur, and pursued the thread of their conversation.

"I thought his eyes were very queer," observed Burton, after expressing an unflattering opinion that Mr. Vandeleur had aged very much in the last few months. "And his voice seemed changed. He mopped up his champagne, though, pretty freely. Do you suppose now, he could have been drunk?"

"Drunk? Not he!" answered Dolly. "There's no stronger-headed fellow out than Vandeleur, nor a less excitable one. Depend upon it, he knows what he's about. Hark! what's that?"

What, indeed! A confused wrangle of voices, raised to an angry pitch—an altercation—a quarrel. Dolly's sharp ears caught Mrs. Vandeleur's tones,

eager, excited, in accents of scorn, expostulation, then entreaty—lastly, terror!

The two listeners sprang across the court, and stood for a moment spell-bound, beneath the windows of a brightly-lighted apartment on the second floor. The rooms below were very lofty, and it was not easy to hear what went on within an upper chamber so high above the ground.

Shadows passing rapidly to and fro traversed the wall opposite the broad open casement.

Hoarse, as with mad fury long suppressed, a whisper hissed down into the court—

"By h—ll, I will!—I'll strangle you!"

Then a long, wild, ringing shriek, and dashing into the house for a rescue, Dolly, closely followed by his friend, came in collision, at the door, with Mrs. Vandeleur in her night-dress, her hair down, her feet bare, her whole appearance denoting extremity of terror and dismay.

"Save me! save me!" screamed Norah, clinging to Dolly like a terrified child. "He'll kill me!—he's raving mad! Help him, somebody!" she added, beginning to sob as her courageous nature reasserted itself. "Help him!—perhaps he'll kill himself!"

Even while she spoke they heard a rushing sound, followed by a dull dead bump on the paved surface of the court. Norah's strength failed her now. Already the hotel was alarmed. Lights were glancing, and servants running about in all directions. They covered Mrs. Vandeleur with a cloak, and carried her off unresisting, for she had fainted away.

"It's all over!" said Burton, as the hand he lifted fell lifeless and inert across Vandeleur's bruised and mangled body, lying in a pool of blood. "Stark naked, too!" he added, looking down at the ghastly mass. "And to jump from such a height! He must have been as mad as Bedlam!"

He must indeed! That poor terrified woman, now happily insensible, could have told them how her husband forced himself into her chamber, raving at her with a maniac's incoherent fury, tearing off article after article of clothing as he stormed; how he hunted her into the sitting-room, threatening her every moment with a horrible death; how she reached the door, in which the key, with its numeral attached, had been fortunately left on the outside, and turned it on him ere she fled; lastly, how to her dying day she would be haunted

by the dire horror that this act of self-defence had caused him to leap through the window into the courtyard below!

It was well for Mrs. Vandeleur that she had a true friend like Egremont to stand by her in this sad crisis of her life. Everything that could be done for her comfort was attended to by kind-hearted, sympathising Dolly, and it was only at her repeated entreaties, and the considerations of propriety she strongly urged—for Norah never lost the habit of thinking for herself—that he consented to prosecute his journey with Burton next day, and left her to the charge of an English physician resident in the town. The following paragraph appeared in *Galignani* within a week of the accident:—

"*Deplorable Catastrophe at Heidelberg, and Supposed Suicide of a Gentleman.*—On Friday last, this romantic old town was startled by one of those awful calamities which occur at intervals to rouse us from the apathy of conventional life. An English gentleman of high position, accompanied by his lady, and attended by several domestics, arrived in the early train from Frankfort to take up his quarters at the *Rheinische-Hof*. After visiting the castle

and other objects of interest in the neighbourhood, he sat down to dinner with a few friends, who parted from him at an early hour apparently in his usual health and spirits. About midnight the inmates of the hotel were alarmed by the screams of his lady, and it was found that the unfortunate gentleman had precipitated himself from an upper-floor window into the courtyard below. Dr. Drum of Heidelberg was promptly on the spot, but medical skill proved necessarily unavailing in so frightful a castastrophe. Continued ill-luck at the play-tables of Homburg is rumoured to have been the cause of this rash act; and when we mention the name of the victim as John Vandeleur, Esq., of Oak-over, in the county of ——, we leave our readers to infer how enormous must have been the pecuniary losses that could thus drive the owner of a princely fortune into the commission of so awful and irrevocable a crime. — *Quem Deus vult perdere prius dementat!*"

This paragraph, quotation and all, found its way into the London papers, and his old associates in clubs or such places of public resort talked about "poor Vandeleur" for a day or two, and forgot him. "Married, wasn't he? and for the second

time?" said the Club-world. "Ah! he was always as mad as a hatter! Very pretty girl, was she? Clergyman's daughter somewhere near his own place, and thirty years younger than himself! Ah! I wish she had jumped out at window instead of him, and I'd been underneath to catch her!"

And this was Vandeleur's "*Requiescat in pace!*"

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WORK.

I REMEMBER long ago to have witnessed a thrilling drama called, if my memory serves me, by the appalling title of *The Vampire*, the continuity of which was entrusted, with blind confidence in their powers of ideality, to the imagination of an English audience. Between its acts, while the orchestra played the "Galop" in *Gustavus*, while you rose in your stall, turned round to survey the house, wiped your glasses, and sat down again, an interval of fifty years or more was supposed to elapse. I will not call upon my readers for quite so elastic a stretch. I will only ask them to imagine that more than a lustre, say rather less than two, has passed away since the quiet of the *Rheinische-Hof* at Heidelberg was disturbed by the eccentri-

cities of its English visitors,—such a period as makes but little difference in our own feelings, or our own appearance, but sadly thins our male friends' hair, and plays the deuce with the skin and teeth of the women we adore—such a period as scatters over the world almost any party of half-a-dozen, however staunch and cohesive it may have boasted its immutability—such a period as has materially altered the fortunes and position of each individual in our story. Perhaps of none more than Gerard Ainslie, destined as it would seem to fill the part of that "rolling stone" which proverbially "gathers no moss;" though why any stone, rotatory or at rest, should be the better for that vegetable covering, I leave for explanation to those who are more discerning in the wisdom of proverbs than myself.

Gerard, then, ruined and almost broken-hearted, must have had no resource left but for a sum of money received through Messrs. Goldsmith, from a banker at Heidelberg, to be delivered into the young man's own hand, on receipt of an undertaking in writing that he would leave Homburg and its temptations within an hour. The conditions were necessarily accepted, and Gerard, penniless but for this timely assistance, found himself cast on the

world with a few pounds indeed in his pocket, but a very vague idea of where he was to get any more when these were spent.

There was a refuge, however, for the destitute in those days, and a resource for the desperate, of which we hear but little now. Some few years ago when a man thrust his hands in his trousers' pockets, to find them empty, he borrowed all he could get from the friend who would pay highest to get rid of him (generally a relative, or one on whom he had some claim of kindred or gratitude), bought two red shirts and a revolver, took a steerage passage in a "Black Ball Liner," and was off to the gold-diggings!

The plan had many advantages; not the least of them being the probability that the adventurer would never come back.

So this young gentleman, who had scarcely done a day's work in his life, made his way to the modern El Dorado, to cook, and dig, and wield a pickaxe, and shake a riddle till his back ached, alternating these labours with the nursing of a sick comrade or two, and a narrow squeak for his own life from cholera, followed by a prostrating attack of fever and ague.

But it was just such a training as was wanted to

make a man of him. Who would have believed that the bearded, bronzed, powerful-looking fellow sitting over a wood fire at night, with three or four miners, not a whit more rough-looking customers than himself, turning a "damper" in the embers, holding a short black pipe between his teeth, could be the white-handed Gerard Ainslie, of Mr. Archer's pupil-room, and the depôt of the 250th Regiment of the line? Who would have supposed, while the deep manly voice of a comrade trolled out how

> "They fitted a grey marble slab to a tomb,
> And fair Alice lies under the stone,"

that the drop caught in that shaggy beard, and glistening in the fire-light, was a tribute of memory to the delicate beauty of pale, haughty Mrs. Vandeleur, how many thousand miles away? Tears, indeed! There were plenty of bold hearts there with a spot in them soft enough to be stirred by that plaintive ditty; and many a daring, desperate man, sitting over his camp-fire within hearing of "Ben Bolt," was crying too, like a woman or a child.

But they worked fourteen hours a day nevertheless, and Gerard found himself at San Francisco with eleven hundred pounds in his pocket, and his,

heart eaten by that home-sickness which is so apt to attack the wanderer just when his fortunes are on the turn, and it is folly to think of going back so soon.

Here the demon of play took hold of him once more, and he lost nearly half his gains in a single venture. But it cured him. The man was altered now. His whole character was hardened and improved. He had been living for months together with his life in his hand. He had earned every penny he got literally with the sweat of his brow. He had shed blood in self-defence without scruple, but he had nursed more than one staunch friend through deadly sickness with the gentle tenderness of a woman. He had lost the selfishness that makes a man a gambler. With him, indeed, it had been the selfishness of too plastic and impressionable a nature; but it was gone. He had been through the fire, and was forged, so to speak, and tempered into steel: yet one image, that of Norah Welby, the fair young girl he remembered so vividly under the cedar at her father's parsonage, was burnt all the deeper and more indelibly into his heart. It kept him pure through many a scene of vice and temptation; if not a happier, he felt that it made him a

better man; and, as he sometimes told himself with a sigh, it could never be effaced.

Gerard Ainslie played no more after his loss at San Francisco, but he abandoned all intention of returning at once to England, and ventured his remaining six hundred on a speculation of sheep-farming, which seemed promising enough, in Vancouver's Island. For a year or two he prospered wonderfully. His farm flourished, his flocks and herds increased, he erected water-mills, he hired emigrants from the Scottish Highlands who were not afraid of work, and entered fairly on the high road to fortune. He had even taken to himself an overseer, and considered he was entitled to a few weeks' sporting relaxation in the bush. So he started on a two months' expedition, killed very little game, and returned to find himself a ruined man. His overseer had sickened and died. His Highland emigrants had neglected everything. The rot had broken out amongst his sheep, and the murrain had swept off his cattle. Worse than all, a flood had come down to spoil his crops, and had carried away the mills in which he had sunk nearly his whole capital. The wreck of his little fortunes barely enabled him to return to the diggings, and,

begin again, richer only in experience than when he came out from England many years before.

But men get used to hard usage from Fortune, as from any other foe. After the second time or so, nobody cares a fig for a knock-down blow, moral or physical. Gerard was man enough to feel thankful now that Norah's happiness was in no way dependent on his exertions; that she was comfortable, well provided for, and had *almost* forgotten him. Not quite: he would not have her forget him quite. So he took to the mattock again with a will, but it was uphill work this time. Most of the holes he tried were worn out, and once (a rare occurrence) he was robbed by his mate; but, after many fluctuations, he found himself at last with wrinkles about his eyes, and a few grey hairs in his brown beard, on board a noble packet-ship, plunging gallantly before the trades, homeward bound!

His passage was paid; he had a few dollars in a pocket-book for mess expenses, and two hundred pounds in gold sewed into a belt, which he wore under his shirt. He would not be robbed by comrade or shipmate a second time. And this modest sum represented as many years of labour, as much of privation and self-denial, as have sometimes gone to the acquisition of half-a-million!

The good ship ran her knots off handsomely enough, and about daybreak on a spring morning came alongside the quay at Liverpool, to discharge, first her passengers, and then the cargo of wool and tallow with which she floated deep in the water. For the accommodation of the former, an inclined plane, consisting of a slippery plank or two, with a lofty hand-rail, was hastily thrust upward; and along this insecure gangway the steerage passengers, following each other like a flock of sheep, slipped, and climbed, and stumbled to the shore. Gerard was in no hurry, but drifted onward with the others, his little valise in his hand, the belt that carried all his worldly wealth round his waist. Immediately in front of him was a woman returning to England with two fatherless children—the one in her arms, the other, an urchin of scarcely four years old, clinging to the skirts of her dirty cotton gown. The little fellow seemed bewildered by the crush, confusion, and novelty of the situation; he had forgotten what land was like, and his poor short legs were cramped and numbed by long confinement on board ship. He missed his footing, let go of his mother's gown, and passing easily under the hand-rail, tumbled headlong into

six fathom of water in the dock-basin. It was a ghastly face that turned on Gerard's under the grey light of early morning; but in the mother's wild, hopeless, tortured stare he read what had happened almost before the scream rose on her pale, parted lips, and the splash below subsided into eddying circles of green, bubbling water.

He never thought twice about it. Ere they could heave a rope's-end from the quay, he was overboard too, diving after a wisp of white that eluded his reach, like a streak of dim, distant light in a dream. The seconds are very long under water. It seemed an age before he could grasp it; but he rose at last, child and all, to the surface, the lighter that his belt had given way, and the whole of his two hundred sovereigns were buried far below the good ship's keel—a ransom, and a cheap one, as he swore directly he got his breath, for the poor, innocent little life.

They had him, with his pale, limp burden clinging to his neck, in the bight of a rope the instant he appeared; and they cheered him, those honest sailors, with a will. Nay, they even raised a modest subscription amongst themselves, when they learned his loss, that brought the tears into his eyes. While

the half-frantic mother, who had nothing to give but her prayers, knelt at his feet on the hard quay, and kissed his brown, weather-beaten hands, calling him an angel from heaven all the time! And so he was to *her* the good angel of deliverance, for whom she taught her children, too, to pray such prayers as I think are never offered up in vain.

Thus it was that Gerard Ainslie touched English ground once more as poor in worldly goods as when he left it, but rich in a fund of self-control and self-reliance, not to mention the glow of a gallant action, and the praise of a few stout, honest, kindly hearts!

CHAPTER XI.

"AFTER LONG YEARS."

I AM persuaded that in our English climate, and under the conditions of our social existence, so favourable to their ascendancy, women wear considerably better than men. I know such an opinion is rank heresy with the multitude, and that it is held an established axiom, though I am ignorant how it can be borne out by common-sense, that a woman is virtually older than a man of the same age. The truth of this assertion I emphatically deny. Go into any London drawing-room, or other gathering of the upper classes, and while there is no mistaking the *men* of forty, you will find it impossible, judging by appearance, to guess any of the women's ages within ten years. The same argument holds good, though in a modified degree, at

a country merry-making or a fair. Jack, when his eighth lustre is quivering on its close, shows marks of time and hard usage far more plainly than Gill, and finds himself bent, grey, and wrinkled, while she remains brown, comely, and "upright as a-bolt."

The years, then, with their recurring hardships and vicissitudes, that scored lines on Gerard Ainslie's brow, and left little silver threads about his temples, had but developed Norah Vandeleur's beauty into the grace and majesty of mature womanhood. While she retained all her girlish symmetry of form, she had acquired a certain dignity of gait and bearing that would have become a queen. While her mere physical charms had lost nothing of their colour and freshness, the deep eyes, the rare smile, had gained such powers of fascination as spring from a cultivated intellect: alas! too often, also, from a saddened, suffering heart.

"Isn't she beautiful? But she doesn't look happy!" Such was the verdict in every society she entered. Such was the expression of admiration, so qualified, from nine out of every ten people who turned round to look at her as she walked through a room.

With great personal advantages, with a subdued, graceful, and exceedingly natural manner, it required but a very few London seasons to establish Mrs. Vandeleur as one of the best known and most eagerly sought after of those beautiful ornaments whom people are always anxious to see on their staircases, in their reception-rooms, and at their pleasantest dinner-parties. Strange to say, the women did not hate her half so rancorously as might have been expected. At first, indeed, the appearance in their cruising-grounds of a craft so trim, so taut, so formidable as a privateer, and carrying guns calculated to do such execution, roused resistance, no less than apprehension, and they prepared to combine against her with that energetic animosity, devoid of scruple, ruth, or fair play, which is so commendable a feature in their warfare on their own sex.

But when they found, as they soon did, that the beautiful, rakish-looking schooner was averse to piracy, and careless of plunder; when they saw her dismiss the prizes that ran so eagerly under her bows, contemptuously indeed, and with little goodwill, but obviously as scorning nothing more than the notion of towing them into port; when, to speak plainly, they discovered that Mrs. Vandeleur

cared as little for the homage of mankind in general, including their own faithless adorers, as for all the rest of the glitter by which she was surrounded, looking, as indeed she felt, a good deal bored with the whole thing, they declared, first, neutrality, then adhesion, soon protested that it was better to have her for a friend than an enemy, and finally paid her the high compliment of voting her one of themselves.

She had taken a charming little house in Belgravia, of which the door always seemed fresh painted, and the bell-handles lately gilt. Her footmen were tall and well powdered, her horses stepped up to their noses, and her carriages looked as if they went every year to be "done up" at the coachmaker's. A pair of those valuable horses, one of those well-varnished carriages, was to be seen every night in the season waiting for Mrs. Vandeleur, wherever there was a gathering of the smartest people in London. These assemblages are not always intensely amusing. I believe coachman and horses were less delighted to drive home than the mistress herself. Nevertheless, one year after another found her going the same monotonous round,—flattered, admired, courted, lonely, wearied, wondering why

she did it, and vowing every season should be her last.

People thought it "so odd Mrs. Vandeleur didn't marry!" and more than one spendthrift, faultless in attire and irresistible in manners, took upon himself, at short notice, to ask the question from a personal point of view. I never heard that any of these could complain of not receiving a sufficiently explicit answer. But an elderly nobleman, with an unencumbered rent-roll and a grown-up family, who really admired her for herself, took her rebuff so much to heart that he left London forthwith, though in the middle of June, and was seen no more till the last fortnight in July.

Perhaps this disconsolate suitor, whose first wife had been what is popularly called "a Tartar," studied Mrs. Vandeleur's character with more attention than the rest. He used to puzzle himself as to why it was he got on so much better with her in general society than alone. He used even to fancy that if his love-making could only be done across a dinner-table, he might have a chance of success; but you can't tell a woman you are getting too fond of her for your own happiness—which I imagine is as good a way of opening the trenches as any other—through

an *épergne* and a quantity of ferns! He used to marvel why, in a *tête-à-tête*, she was so conventional, so guarded, so chilling, absent, too, in manner, whatever he might say, as if she was thinking of something else. Above all would he have given his earldom to know *what* it was, or whom, that those deep, dreamy eyes were looking at, through, and far beyond his own goodly person—far beyond the Venetian blinds in the windows, his brougham in the street, and his brother-in-law's house over the way.

So, you see, a good many people were in love with handsome Mrs. Vandeleur, all in their different styles; for the epidemic, though dangerous, no doubt, in some cases, attacks its victims in various dissimilar forms. With one it produces a deep and abiding sore, burning, festering, eating its pernicious way into the quick; with another it becomes a low fever, dispiriting, querulous, prostrating body and mind alike; while from you or me it may pass away in a slight local inflammation, best cured by tonics, anodynes, or perhaps the homœopathic remedy of a counter-irritant.

When it has taken deep root in the system, and can withstand the wholesome influence of absence,

change of scene, and fresh faces, I had rather not prescribe for it. There is, indeed, one specific left, proverbially irremediable as death, and it is called Marriage; but I will not take upon myself to affirm that even this last resource, desperate though it be, would prove successful in some of the more fatal cases that have come under my notice.

With all her noble, well-dressed, well-known lovers and admirers, it may be that Mrs. Vandeleur had none so unselfish, so devoted, so true as Gerard Ainslie, in his obscure lodgings and his shabby clothes — Gerard Ainslie, who for all these long years had never looked upon her face but in his dreams, and yet to whom, sleeping or waking, that dear face was ever present, pale, delicate, and beautiful as of old. This idea—for it was but an idea, after all—had grown to be the one refinement of his life, the one link that connected him with the other pleasant world which he began to remember but dimly, to which he saw no prospect that he would ever return.

He had come to London, of course, and with a certain sensation of honest pride that at least he had been no burden to his relation, sought out his great-uncle to ask, not for assistance, but a simple

recommendation and assurance that he was an honest man. The old gentleman had married his housekeeper, and the door was shut in Gerard's face. He turned rather bitterly away, and for a moment wished himself back in Vancouver's Island; but he was accustomed to hard usage now. He had a pound or two in his pocket, and his training during the last few years had made of the eager, impulsive stripling a strong, persistent man.

He determined not to break in on his little store till he could use it to advantage. That same afternoon he earned a supper and a bed unloading one of the lighters at a wharf below bridge. The men who worked with him were little rougher than some of his mates at the diggings—more vicious, perhaps, certainly not so courteous, and less reckless; but he shared his tobacco and drank his beer with them contentedly enough. Nay, he engaged himself at good wages for a fortnight's spell at the same labour, which did him a deal of good, and put a few more shillings in his pocket. These kept him while he tried his hand at a little authorship for the penny papers, and then he resolved to embark all his capital, something short of five pounds, in another venture. There was nothing of the gambler left in

Gerard now but the cool courage of a wise speculator, whose experience tells him when it is justifiable to risk all.

So he invested in a suit of clothes, such as he had not worn for years. Scanning himself in the tailor's full-length glass, he could not forbear a smile.

"It's odd enough," he muttered. "I'll be hanged if I don't look like a gentleman still!" And so he did; and so thought the editor of *The Holborn Gazette and Sporting Telegraph for the East End*, when the unsuccessful gold-digger stepped into the office of that wonderful journal to offer his contributions with as much indifference as if he had been a duke. Truth to tell, he cared little whether they were accepted or not, having in his heart a hankering preference, which common-sense told him was ill-judged, for the out-of-door labour and rough hard-working life on the river.

The editor, a man of observation, could not believe that weather-browned face and those large muscular shoulders were of the fraternity who live by wielding the pen. So well-developed a frame, clad in broad-cloth, instead of fustian, could only belong to the classes who have leisure to spend

their time in open-air pursuits for pleasure, rather than profit. And as it is notorious that a man who can make his own terms always has the best of a bargain, Gerard Ainslie walked out into the street with an assurance of employment that would at least keep him from starving.

And now, I think, came the unhappiest part of his life. His work was distasteful, and he got through it with difficulty. The profits enabled him, indeed, to live, but that was all. He had no society of any kind, and often found himself pining for the rough cordiality and boisterous mirth of the gold-seekers; for the deep voices, the jolly songs, the glare of the camp-fires, the fragrant fumes of the "honey dew," and the *tot* of rum that passed from beard to beard, with an oath, perhaps, but an oath as expressive of good-fellowship and good-will as a blessing.

A cup of weak tea, in a two-pair back, seemed but a mild exchange for the old roystering life, after all. His health failed, his cheek grew hollow, and he began to assume the appearance of a worn-out, broken-down man. About this period Gerard very nearly took to drinking. He was saved by an accident, resulting, indeed, from the very habit he was

disposing himself to acquire. When work was over, he would go to dinner, as dine he must, at the nearest tavern. Without absolutely exceeding, he would then sit smoking and sipping, smoking and sipping, till it was time to go to bed. What could he do? It was his only relaxation. To spend the night at a theatre was hot and expensive; to walk the streets, cold and uncomfortable; besides, it wore his boots out. He tried "Evans's" more than once; but Mr. Green was so courteous and agreeable, the singing so ravishing, the cave of harmony so comfortable, that it led him into the disbursement of more small change than he could afford. So he relapsed into such dull, stupid, sleepy evenings as I have described. They told on his dress, his constitution, and his appearance. One night, after he had exhausted the evening papers, a neighbour, leaving the next table, handed him the *Morning Post*, a journal good enough to devote whole columns to recording the amusements of the aristocracy, and obtaining in consequence a vast circulation about the West End of London, though rarely to be found in any of the chop-houses near the Strand. Glancing his eye wearily over the "Fashionable Intelligence," Gerard started to see

Mrs. Vandeleur's name amongst a hundred others, as having been at the Opera the night before. He sprang to his feet, threw away his half-smoked cigar, and finished his gin-and-water at a gulp. She was in London, then! Actually in the same town with himself! Perhaps not half a mile off at that moment! And then the cold, sickening thought came over him, that he, the ruined, shabby, vagrant penny-a-liner, was separated as effectually here from the rich, high-bred, fashionable lady, as if the Pacific still rolled between them, and he was again sifting gravel in his red shirt, to find the gold he had never coveted so eagerly as now.

But the burning thirst came on him once more —the feverish, ungovernable longing to look on that face again. He would have sold his life, he thought, almost his soul, but to see her for a minute. He could not rest; he could not sit still. The evening was far advanced, but he wandered out into the streets, with the wild notion, which yet carried a vague happiness, that he was in search of Norah; that, come what might, he would at least stand face to face with her again. His own weary footstep, once so quick and active, still reminded him of those walks across the marshes, in the happy

days when life was all before him, and hope had something to offer better than wealth, or honour, or renown. It seemed but yesterday; and yet the contrast between then and now smote him with a pity for himself that filled his eyes with tears. They did him good: they cleared his brain, and he grew practical once more.

He was determined to see Norah, no doubt; but he must find out where she lived; and for that purpose he entered a stationer's shop in Bond Street, not yet closed, bought a pennyworth of note-paper—which left him exactly a shilling in his pocket—and asked leave to look in the "Court Guide."

He did not need to hunt far down the V's for the name he wanted; and in less than twenty minutes, without considering what he should do next, he found himself at Mrs. Vandeleur's door.

It was something to feel the possibility of her being within ten yards of the spot where he stood; but his wandering life, with all its vicissitudes, had not rooted out a regard for those inexorable *convenances* which are stronger than gates of triple brass and bars of steel. How could he ask to see Mrs. Vandeleur at nine o'clock in the evening? he

in his now shabby hat and worn-out clothes! Why, the servant would probably send for a constable to order him away! No, he must trust to chance and time; patient and wary, like a "painter" crouching for its spring, or a hunter waiting at a "salt-lick" for a deer.

He had made several turns opposite the house, and had, indeed, attracted the attention of an observant policeman, when one of the many postal deliveries with which our leisure hours are cursed came to his assistance. A powdered head rose from Mrs. Vandeleur's area to the level of the postman's feet, and a simpering face grinned through the railings.

"Robert Smart?" asked the Government functionary, stern and abrupt, as behoves one whose time is precious.

"Robert Smart it is!" answered the footman, and immediately tore open the envelope thrust into his hand. It was a ship-letter, written on thin paper.

Gerard had found his opportunity, and now drew a bow at venture.

"Is your name Smart?" said he, stopping short, and looking at the man as if he saw something

in his face that he recognised. "Haven't you a brother at Ballarat? If so, I've seen him within a twelvemonth."

"No!" answered the man, grinning again with surprise and gratification; "but I've a cousin there of my own name. I've got this here letter from him just now."

Gerard had picked up some experience knocking about the world. "I can tell you all about him," said he, "for I knew him well. If you're only half as good a chap as your cousin, I dare say you'll step round and take a toothful of something short to our better acquaintance. I little thought my old pal's cousin would be one of the first friends I should meet in this great rambling town."

Such an invitation was too tempting to be refused. Mr. Smart had but to return indoors for his coat, and make some arrangements with an under-housemaid, contrary to the standing orders of the establishment, as to answering the door-bell. Ere many minutes elapsed, the footman was deep in a quartern of gin-and-cloves, purchased with his last shilling by his new acquaintance.

Communicative and affable, Mr. Smart soon informed Gerard of Mrs. Vandeleur's present where-

abouts and future movements. She was dining with a "h'earl," as he called it, near St. James's Square, and was going thence to Lady Billesdon's party. He knew it, though he was himself off duty that night, because the carriage was ordered to fetch her at eleven, and she was not coming home to dress, but going straight on from her dinner to the ball. Eleven o'clock he was sure, for he carried the order himself to the coachman, who "cussed horrible;" and wouldn't his new friend take his share of another quartern at his, Mr. Smart's, expense?

But his new friend left him more abruptly than he considered compatible with good manners, for eleven was already striking. Gerard hurried off to the "h'earl's," in the vicinity of St. James's Square, but he was too late. Then he walked up and down all night, and waited till morning dawned, and so saw Mrs. Vandeleur get into her carriage to go home; nay, had the additional felicity of picking off the pavement a certain white rose she dropped, to lay it inside his threadbare old waistcoat, next his heart.

This was the man I saw leaning against the street-railings in strong suppressed emotion when I

myself was leaving Lady Billesdon's hospitable mansion after her charming ball; and thus, having brought my story back to the point from which it started, I must take what seafaring men call "a fresh departure," and proceed henceforth in regular order through the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BARRINGTON-BELGRAVE.

A MAN who is leading an unhealthy life at any rate, and who walks about the streets all night under strong feelings of anxiety and agitation, becomes faint and exhausted towards sunrise, and disposed to look favourably even on such humble refreshment as may be procured at an early coffee-stall. Passing one of these, Gerard, feeling in his pockets for the coin he knew was not forthcoming, cast certain wistful glances at a cup of the smoking beverage, which were not lost on the customer for whom it had been poured out—an individual of remarkable, not to say eccentric, demeanour and appearance, oddly cloaked, oddly booted, oddly hatted, majestic in manners, and somewhat shabby in dress.

Diffusing around him an odour of tobacco and brandy, this personage stopped Gerard with an elaborate bow.

"Permit me, sir," he said, in a deep hoarse voice; "I have discovered, perhaps, the hottest and strongest coffee made in the metropolis. Will you allow me to offer you a cup in the way of kindness? At my expense, you understand, sir, at my expense!"

Gerard accepted courteously. The man's manner changed, and he looked hard in the other's face.

"An early bird," said he, folding his shabby cloak across his breast as a Roman drapes himself in his *toga* on the stage; "an early bird, sir, like myself. I make you my compliments, as we say over the water. There is a freshness in the morning air; and to me nature, the mighty mother of creation, in all her moods, is still expansive, still sublime."

They were standing at Hyde Park Corner, and he pointed down Grosvenor Place with the air of one who was indicating the snowy range of the Himalayas, for instance, to a friend who had just come gasping up to Simla from the plains.

"Early indeed," answered Gerard, laughing, "for I have not been to bed."

The other hiccoughed, and sucked in a long pull of his hot coffee.

"You take me," said he, "you take me. A man after my own heart, sir—a kindred spirit—a gentleman too—excuse me——" Here he lifted his hat with a grace that was only spoilt by the limp state of its brim. "A man of mark, no doubt, and a justice of peace in your own county, simple as you stand here—hey? Not been to bed, say you? Marry, sir, no more have I. Will you come and break your fast with me? Now, at once, here, close at hand. I bid you for sheer good-will. But stay —this is scarcely fair."

He winked solemnly, looked at Gerard with an air of half-drunken gravity while he paid for the coffee, then took him by the arm, and proceeded very deliberately—

"I study you, sir—I study you. Do you object to be studied? If you do, say so, and I desist. If you don't, breakfast with me, and I'll go on. I studied you from the first, before you reached Apsley House. It's my profession, and I glory in it! Do you think now, in the interests of art and

as a personal favour, you could repeat the same expression you wore then, after breakfast? I could catch it in five minutes. Come, sir, I'll be frank with you. I want it for the part of Rinaldo in *The Rival's Revenge*. I've been looking for it for twenty years, and hang me if I've ever seen the real trick of the thing till this morning. Up here, if you please; they know me here. This way!"

Gerard was not averse to breakfast, nor unwilling to take advantage of any society that might distract him from his own thoughts. He accompanied his new friend accordingly into a small tavern in one of the streets off Piccadilly, where a snug little breakfast was laid for them almost before they had time to sit down. While his entertainer extricated himself with some difficulty from the voluminous recesses of his cloak, Gerard removed his hat, and took a chair opposite the window. The other peered curiously in his guest's face.

"Excuse me," said he; "I suspected it from the first. I am a man of honour. We are alone; you need be under no apprehension. How do you do, Mr. Ainslie?"

Gerard started. "You know me then?" he exclaimed. "And who the devil are——I mean,

where have I had the pleasure of meeting you before?"

"You are altered," answered his companion, "and you had no more beard than the palm of my hand when I saw you last; but I never forget a face. I have studied your appearance and manners many a time for light parts in genteel comedy. I do assure you, sir, without compliment now, that my unparalleled success in Frank Featherbrain was chiefly owing to your unconscious exposition of the part. For the real empty-headed fop the critics said they never saw its equal."

"But I don't remember you," said Gerard, not so much flattered as the other seemed to expect. "Your face is perfectly strange to me. And yet," he added, with perfect truth, "I don't think I should ever have forgotten it."

His companion looked much pleased. "Striking, sir," he answered, "striking, I believe; and expressive, it is no vanity to admit. But you remember a certain hurdle-race many years ago, in which you sustained a severe and heavy fall. I picked you up, sir, and saw you home. I was lodging at the same house. My name was Bruff then, sir; I have changed it since. Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, at your

service." Producing a limp little card, he handed it to Gerard with a good deal of pretension.

The latter could but express his delight at such an introduction; and Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, as we must now call him, continued the conversation, working vigorously at his breakfast the while.

"A sad accident, sir, a sad accident. We put you into a fly, and we bore you upstairs, I and—and—another party—an extremely talented party that, and with great personal attractions. Would it be indiscreet to ask? Ah! pardon me, not another word. I see I have touched a chord. Poor thing! poor thing! I remember now; so young, so beauteous, and so early—ah!"

Mr. Belgrave hid his face, as under the influence of painful sympathy, in a red cotton handkerchief. He did not observe, therefore, the puzzled expression of Gerard's countenance. The latter, indeed, often wondered what had become of Fanny, though thinking of her, no doubt, less continuously than was due to the remembrance of a wife, who might be alive or dead. He inclined, perhaps, to the opinion that she was no more; but this part of his past life had become so distasteful to him, that he dismissed it as much as possible from his

thoughts, and, indeed, had no means of making inquiries as to her welfare, or even her existence, had he been ever so anxious to take her back again, which he was not.

After such a pause as on the stage allows eight bars of music to be played without interruption, Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, becoming gradually sober, but feeling none the less interested in the broken-down gentleman who was breakfasting with him, put a leading question.

"And may I ask, sir, as an old friend—perhaps I should say a new friend and an old acquaintance—what you are doing in London, and how you like it?"

"Doing!" answered Gerard, glancing down at his own worn attire; "why, doing devilish badly, as you see; and for *liking* it, I don't like it at all. I'm what they call a hack, I believe, on a penny paper. Since you saw me, Mr. Belgrave, I've carried a pen, and I've carried a pickaxe. I'll tell you what, the last is the easier to handle, and earns the best wages of the two."

Mr. Belgrave ruminated, rang the bell, and ordered two small glasses of brandy.

"A man of education," he observed dogmatically,

"a man of observation, a man who has lived in society, and seen the world—why don't you write for the stage?"

Gerard stared, and swallowed his glass of brandy at a gulp.

"Do they pay you well?" said he, after a pause. "It's not a bad idea; I can but try."

"If you think of it," answered the other, wisely forbearing to commit himself on the remunerative question, "I could put you in the way of having a piece read, which is a great matter, and sometimes, though not invariably, a necessary preliminary to its being accepted. I am engaged myself at present at the Accordion, and have some interest with the manager. Between you and me, though of course it goes no farther, I am taking one or two inferior parts as a personal favour to that gentleman. We expect an actress next month from America, who has never yet played on English boards: we require a new piece for her—something original, startling, galvanic. I told Mr. Bowles, only last night, our best chance would be a piece from an untried hand. Will you undertake it? As I said before, if *you* will write, I can engage that *he* shall read."

"But I don't understand stage-business," objected Gerard, more than half disposed to comply. "I know nothing about your prompter's box, your cues, your exits and entrances, your ins and outs, and the rest of it. I'm afraid I should make a rare mess, even if I could manage the plot."

"Pooh! pooh! not a bit of it!" answered the actor. "I'll put you right on all those matters of mere detail. I have an especial gift for what I call 'drilling a company.' You set to work, write the piece, have it ready in a fortnight, and I'll answer for all the rest."

"Can't you give me a hint or two?" said Gerard, a little alarmed at the magnitude of the undertaking into which he was about to plunge.

"Hints!" replied the actor; "hundreds of them! But they're no use. Look ye here, sir. The whole secret of success lies in three words. Shall I repeat them? First, situation! Second, situation! Third, situation! Startle your audience—that's the way to treat 'em, sir—and keep 'em startled all through. Plot! what's the use of a plot? Nobody understands it, nor would care to attend to it if they did. Improbabilities! you can't have too many of 'em! What the devil do people go to the play for, but to

see something different from real life? Drown your characters in a wash-hand basin, cut their throats with the door-scraper, or blow them to atoms with an Armstrong gun out of a four-post bed! Don't be afraid of it. Give us something to wonder at; but keep all your action as much as possible in one place, and mind nobody's on the stage for more than two minutes at a time. The less they have to say the better. We'll take care there's soft music playing all through. It's easier for the author, and pleasanter to the audience. I don't think I can tell you anything more. Waiter, the bill, and another small glass of brandy. I must wish you good morning now. I've to be at rehearsal in an hour. Keep in mind what I've said, and your play will run three hundred nights, though it hasn't a leg to stand on. Adieu!"

So Mr. Barrington-Belgrave swaggered off, and Gerard betook himself to his melancholy lodging, somewhat inspirited by the new opening he espied, and wondering how it was that Mrs. Vandeleur, though she had grown more beautiful than ever, should have looked so exactly like the picture of her he had been wearing in his heart for more years now than he liked to count.

CHAPTER XIII.

ORIGINAL COMPOSITION.

THOUGH as yet but a few weeks old at the trade, Gerard Ainslie, I fear, had already contracted a vice which appears more or less the result of all continuous literary labour—namely, an ignoble tendency to become chary of material, to use many words for the expression of few ideas, and to beat out the gilding itself very thin, so as to cover the greatest possible amount of surface. Tale-writing, even for such a paper as the *Holborn Gazette*, was a pursuit less likely to encourage than exhaust fertility of invention, and our new-fledged author sat down to his deal writing-table with an overwhelming sense of the difficulties he had before him. Gerard was far too wise, however, to think of abandoning his late career in favour of the new opening offered by

Mr. Barrington-Belgrave. Under any circumstances, he would stick to the *Holborn Gazette* so long as it produced a regular salary. Bread and cheese were hard enough to get. He resolved not to leave go of the one while he made a grasp at the other; so he began to ponder how that same beating-out process, so essential to the making up of his weekly task, might be brought to bear on the construction of a melodrama — gorgeous, of course, in decoration; characteristic, if possible, in dialogue and costume; but above all, as he remembered with a sigh, startling in its situations!

He recalled the expression of Mr. Barrington-Belgrave's large, close-shaven, beetle-browed face, while insisting on this particular essential. He remembered the solemnity, not entirely owing to brandy-and-water, of this enthusiast while he warned his pupil that extravagance, however glaring, was preferable to common-place; he recollected the examples adduced as stimulants to the attention of a British audience, and his heart sank within him while he pondered. But, as I said before, he had already learned some of the tricks of the trade; and it occurred to him, after brief consideration, that he might make a tale of mystery and horror, on which

he was then engaged for the *Holborn Gazette,* answer the double purpose of a thrilling romance and a new drama.

One fellow's hero, as Lord Dundreary would say, is very like another fellow's hero; and, after all, ring the changes on them how you will, there is but little variety, except in dress, amongst the puppets that make up the interest of imaginative literature, whether for the library or the stage. You will find in "Ivanhoe," for instance—and I name that romance because everybody has read it, and with equal interest—you will find, I say, in "Ivanhoe," the regular stock characters necessary for the construction of every narrative and every plot. If you look for anything beyond these, you will have considerable difficulty in hitting on it.

First, there is Wilfrid himself, the hero, pure and simple, type of strength, courage, address, rectitude, modesty, and good looks. Would he not have been Sir Gawain at the round table, Sir Charles Grandison in the last century, and more fire-eating dandies than I can name in all the novels of the present? Dickens has got him a situation as an usher at a Yorkshire school; Thackeray taught him to paint, sent him to Charter-House, and married

him to Rowena instead of Rebecca, though he took him out of *that* scrape too before the end of the third volume; while Lever, remembering certain proclivities for spur and spear, purchased his commission, and shipped him off to serve under the Great Duke in the uniform of an Irish dragoon. We might pursue the parallel through every one of the characters who attended the tournament at Ashby-de-la-Zouche. There is the Black Knight, strong, good-tempered, and not burdened with wisdom; Front-de-Bœuf, strong, bad-tempered, and totally devoid of scruple. Have we not seen the one with bare neck and glazed hat, the other in high boots and broad black belt, whenever the nautical drama sets Jack Hearty, the blue-jacket, in opposition to Paul Perilous, the pirate? Bois Guilbert—and so far the Templar's title remains equally appropriate—has of late become a lawyer, but the sort of lawyer who keeps prussic acid in his inkstand, and a "six-shooter" in his blue bag. Is not Bracy the Lovelace of "Clarissa Harlowe," and the Sir Charles Coldstream of "Lady Clutterbuck?" Parson Adams was no heavier a bruiser, and scarcely more respectable a priest, than the Clerk of Copmanhurst. Gurth and Wamba have worn the powder

and plush of every livery in vogue since the first French revolution. Cedric of Rotherwood has come down to farm his own estate of less than a hundred acres; and Athelstane the Unready has been so often before the footlights at the shortest notice, and in such various guise, that he deserves rather to be called Vertumnus the Versatile.

With regard to the ladies, for many centuries we have been limited to two classes of heroines—the dark-eyed and affectionate, the blue-eyed and coy. Rowena and Rebecca must be quite tired of dressing over and over again for their parts; and if for nothing else, we owe Miss Braddon a mine of gratitude that she has introduced us at last to a more original style—to a young person with a good deal of red in her hair, and a refreshing contempt for many of our long-cherished superstitions, including those inculcated by the Church Catechism, though it must be admitted that, however fascinating she may make her wicked witches, the right moral is always skilfully worked out in the end.

If Gerard Ainslie had ever read Miss Braddon's novels, he would of course have seized on any one he found untouched, and turned it into an original play of his own composition; but there is little time

for study at the diggings, and he found himself cast on the meagre resources of his intellect instead. So he sat down, and proceeded to convert his half-written story into a melodrama in three acts, with three situations in each act, the whole to be played over in less than two hours and a quarter. Obviously, the dialogue need distress him but little. Interjections would do most of that. No, those indispensable situations were what filled him with misgiving and dismay.

His own story was of the present time; he intended to lay the scene of his drama early in the seventeenth century. This became a matter of trifling importance when he reflected that he need but change the dresses of his characters, and make them speak the few words they had to say in rather more high-flown language. It is always supposed that the later we go back into history, the less we find the tone of ordinary conversation differing from our advertisements of the present day.

There was but little modification needed in this respect, for the readers of the *Holborn Gazette* would have been ill-satisfied without flowery phrases, and long magniloquent periods, just as they thought but little of any domestic story in which the principal

personages were not of exalted rank in the peerage. The tale which Gerard was now preparing afforded them a duke, who kept in close confinement (and this just outside of Belgrave Square) a marchioness in her own right, of whom there are indeed not a great many going about at a time, never suffering her to leave the house, which was perhaps the reason why the artist who illustrated her on wood for the vignettes depicted her under all emergencies in a court-dress with feathers and a fan,—the duke himself wearing loose trousers, and a frock-coat, in the breast of which he studiously concealed his right hand. There was to be nobody in the book of inferior station to a baronet, except the duke's dishonest steward, and he was to die about the middle of the second volume, tortured by remorse, though worth half a million of money.

It would be superfluous to go into the plot of Gerard's novel, but it seemed improbable enough to furnish him with the necessary "situations" for his play, so down he sat to those labours of curtailment, alteration, and disguise, with which such original efforts of the intellect are produced.

It was to be called by the high-sounding title of *Pope Clement; or, the Cardinal's Collapse,* and the

"situations" he trusted would prove startling enough to satisfy the requirements of Mr. Barrington-Belgrave himself. Of these perhaps the least remarkable were the Pope's discovery of the cardinal on his knees to a young lady, disguised as a peasant, who had come to confess; the head of the Catholic Church presiding over a council table, under which was concealed on all-fours an Italian brigand, who proved afterwards, as the plot developed itself, to be the cardinal's own son; lastly, the attempted assassination of this cardinal in the gloomy recesses of the Vatican, by that unnatural child, whose hand is seized, when on the verge of parricide, by the young lady formerly disguised as a peasant, with whom father and son are both in love, but who, preferring the younger admirer, of course, seeks and finds him here very successfully by torchlight.

It is not to be supposed that such dramatic extravagancies were the offspring of Gerard's unassisted brain. On the contrary, he received almost daily visits from Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, who displayed a touching interest in the work, pruning dialogues, offering suggestions, and consuming a good many "brandies-and-sodas" the while. The torchlight scene, indeed, was born chiefly of effects

produced by that imaginative stimulant. In less than a fortnight the drama was pronounced ready for perusal, and Mr. Barrington-Belgrave having previously treated the author to another heavy breakfast, led him off in triumph to the stage-manager's residence, for inspection and possible approval, or, as he happily expressed it, "on sale or return."

The Accordion Theatre stood in the immediate neighbourhood of Seven-Dials. It is needless to observe that Mr. Bowles, on whom devolved all the responsibility and nine-tenths of the trouble connected with that place of amusement, lived as far off as possible from the scene of his labours. After a long walk, terminating in the remote regions of Clapham Rise, Gerard Ainslie found himself waiting in the front parlour of a neat little two-storied house, trying not to hear what was said by Messrs. Bowles and Belgrave in the next room about his own composition. It was difficult, however, to avoid distinguishing the low tones of the actor's voice, obviously urging "extenuating circumstances," in reply to the manager's higher notes, rising with a noble scorn into such expressions as these, "Impracticable! Impossible! Hangs fire! Drags like a dredging-net! Don't tell me; I can see that

without reading it! Look what a business we made of the last. Devilish nearly lost us Kate Carmine; —cost me the doubling of her salary. What the devil did you bring him to *me* for? However, 'the Boss' will be here at the half-hour. I'll lay the blame on him. See him? Well, I don't mind. Devilish gentlemanlike fellow, of course. These poor, broken-down chaps always are. Ask him to step in."

So Gerard stepped in, and found himself face to face with a thin, quiet, well-bred man, who expressed in a tone as different as possible from that which he had heard through the folding-doors, first, regret at having kept him waiting, next, pleasure in making his acquaintance, and lastly, grave doubts whether the play under discussion, though denoting genius, would be adapted, without considerable alteration, to the company and resources of the Accordion.

Mr. Barrington-Belgrave's face brightened. He knew the manager, and this sounded a little more hopeful. Not only did he take an interest in the production of *Pope Clement* on Gerard's account, but he was also persuaded that the character of the brigand was specially adapted to his own talents; and he had, indeed, offered several suggestions

during the composition of the piece, with a view of electrifying a London audience by his rendering of that part. Gerard, watching his friend's countenance, took courage, and offered humbly enough to alter his work in any way that might be pointed out.

"You must give us two more women's parts," suggested Mr. Bowles; "or, let me see—pages. Yes, pages will do better. Can you put in a couple of pages, with something to say? You know," he added, looking at the actor for corroboration, "I can't keep Lydia Goddard and little Jessie White idle; and they draw well, in boy's dresses, both of them."

"Nothing easier!" answered Gerard, wondering in his heart how he should get them in.

"Then there's Violante. Ain't that her name? Yes, Violante. You'll have to kill *her*. She's no use if you don't kill her. Miss Carmine is the only *die-er* out this season. I don't think—I do not think, we could persuade Miss Carmine to take a part without a *die* in it. Then about Mrs. Golightly. There's nothing for Mrs. Golightly. No! She would never condescend to play the Pope. I fear it's impossible. I'm really afraid we must give it

up, or at any rate put it off to another season. Excuse me; there's the door-bell."

Mr. Barrington-Belgrave, watching Gerard's face, which had grown of late sadly worn and pale, was surprised to see it flush at the sound of a voice in the passage.

Next moment the door opened, and 'The Boss,' as Mr. Bowles called him, entered the room.

That gentleman saluted Mr. Belgrave with his usual courtesy; then stood transfixed, and gaping, in speechless surprise.

Our dramatic author broke the silence first.

"Why, Dolly!" said he, "I had no idea that I should ever see you again."

To which the other only answered, "Gerard!" but in a tone of astonishment that spoke volumes.

It is needless to observe, Gerard's play was accepted forthwith. Mr. Egremont, who liked to be busy, had taken upon himself the superior management of the Accordion Theatre; finding the money, of course, but otherwise impeding its efficiency in every possible way; and Dolly was not a man to lose such a chance of helping an old friend at a pinch. It was wonderful how quickly Mr. Bowles's difficulties melted into air. The part of Violante should

be kept for Miss Carmine, failing the American star, whose advent still seemed uncertain. The two young ladies who affected young gentlemen's dresses must take whatever parts they were offered, and be thankful. Lastly, if Mrs. Golightly did not choose to play Pope Clement she might let it alone, and see the performance from the front.

To Mr. Barrington-Belgrave's exceeding admiration, the real manager and the inexperienced playwright walked out arm-in-arm, the former observing, as he jumped into the Hansom-cab waiting at the door, "Good-bye, old man; I've got your address written down here. I wish you could come with me and see the Cup run for. I never was so pleased in my life. We'll meet to-morrow. Take care of yourself." Then, through the little trap-door overhead, "Nine Elms! As hard as you can go. You've just twenty minutes to do it in. Shove on!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CUP DAY.

WHO that is doomed to spend the sweet summer-time in London would miss a Cup day at Ascot, provided he had leisure to make holiday and means for enjoying it? Certainly not Dolly Egremont, whose whole nature stirred and softened to country influences and country scenes, nowhere so powerful, nowhere so delightful, as in the neighbourhood of Windsor Forest. Long before the first week in June, Dolly used to find himself pining for cowslip fragrance, and butter-cup glitter, in waving meadow-grass; for hawthorn, pink and white, on thick green hedges; for golden laburnum trailing across clean cottage windows, and lilacs drooping over bright red-brick walls. Ah! the cockneys are the people to enjoy the country. And Dolly Egremont loved

to boast he was cockney enough to delight even in the ponds about Wandsworth, and the fresh, wild, prairie-like expanse of Barnes Common. As for racing,—well, racing is good fun enough in its way, providing your ventures on that uncertain sport are limited to a sovereign with your friend, or a box of Houbigant's gloves for "the small white hand" that, alas! may be "never your own!" And Dolly liked to look at a good horse as well as most other Englishmen, while, knowing but little of the animal's points, he admired it, perhaps, all the more, and certainly formed a clearer notion of its probable success. Whereas old Cotherstone, who had been breeding thorough-bred stock ever since he came of age, and boasted himself what they call at Newmarket one of "your make-and-shape men," backed his own opinion freely, losing thereby with considerable spirit. Indeed, for the two-year-old scrambles at Northampton and elsewhere, he was so consistently in the wrong as to have become a proverb. It was Dolly's good fortune to meet this veteran sportsman in the train. He might have reaped a good deal of information as to weights, distances, and that mysterious property racing men call "form," had his thoughts not been elsewhere.

Old Cotherstone voted him a capital listener, and prosed on with a perseverance that, to use his habitual jargon, would have convinced the meanest capacity of his powers "to stay a distance;" but Dolly, looking out at window on his own side of the carriage, was pondering on other silks than those which flutter down the straight to be marshalled by a patient starter waving a red flag, of other matches than those which carry weight for age, and of a race run on different conditions from Derby, Oaks, or Ascot Cup—a race not always to the swift, but for which hare and tortoise start on equal terms; in which the loser is sometimes less to be pitied than the winner, and of which the "settling," however long put off, is sure to be heavy, if not unsatisfactory, at last.

Dolly, you see, notwithstanding his jovial, prosperous appearance, considered himself at this time the bounden slave of a damsel who has already appeared in these pages under the name of Miss Tregunter. He had even arrived at calling her "Jane," but this only in his dreams. That eligible young person had expressed an intention of appearing at Ascot with the rest of the world on the Cup day, and Dolly, judging by analogy, expected great

results from the romantic influences of scenery, sunshine, sentiment, judicious flattery, lobster-salad, and champagne-cup.

Miss Tregunter was an heiress. To do him justice, Dolly often wished she was not. The field would have been clearer of rivals, and as his attachment was really disinterested, he would have liked to convince her his admiration was solely for herself.

To-day he meant to say something very marked indeed; he had not the remotest idea what. No wonder, therefore, he listened so gravely to Cotherstone's *résumé* of the racing season up to the present meeting, concluding with a declaration that one could always prophesy these later triumphs from the performances of horses in the spring.

"Ah!" said Dolly, waking out of a brown study, and clothing his thoughts as usual in a garbled quotation from one of his favourite poets,—

> "In the spring a young man's fancy
> Lightly turns to thoughts of love;
> Dam by Stockwell, out of Nancy—
> How they squeeze and how they shove!"

Old Cotherstone stared at this dovetailing of his own conversation, his companion's thoughts, and the pressure they were forced to undergo on emerg-

ing from the train at the narrow entrance to the course. Here, however, they separated, the elder man to penetrate the betting-ring and find out what they were laying about Hyacinth for the Cup, the younger to purchase "cards of the running horses, names, weights, and colours of the riders," for immediate presentation to his lady-love.

We are more interested at present in the less business-like performance of the two, and will follow Mr. Egremont to the grand stand, where ladies now sit in their private boxes much as they sat some eighteen hundred years ago to smile on the dying gladiator in the amphitheatre—some dozen centuries later to wince and shrink, looking down pale and pretty, on splintered lance and rolling charger in the tilt-yard—last week, and the week before, and every week in the season, to whisper, and flirt, and fan themselves, complaining softly of the heat, at the Italian Opera.

Dolly's heart beat faster when he reached Mrs. Vandeleur's box, for under that lady's wing, as having long attained matronly rank, he knew he should find Miss Tregunter; and the boots that had seemed to fit him so well when he left home, the coat in which even Curlewis could find no fault

when he tried it on yesterday, failed all at once to give him the confidence they had hitherto inspired. Of course he blundered in headlong. Of course he offered but a distant greeting to the person he cared for most, but accosted her friend and chaperon with extraordinary cordiality and affection. I suppose women 'understand' these things, but it has always puzzled me how a real attachment can be brought to a happy conclusion, because a man never appears to such disadvantage as in the presence of the woman he loves.

Dolly, however, was safe enough with Mrs. Vandeleur. They were fast friends. Such friends as man and woman only become when there can be no question of love-making between them. Where the heart is touched, there is always a certain element of strife. He was the only gentleman in the box. She tried her best to put him at his ease, and made a place for him by Miss Tregunter, who looked quite captivating in a pale pink dress, like a half-blown hawthorn.

"I see you stick to your colours," said Dolly nervously, and showing his own more than was becoming, in his round cheeks. "I remember you wore pink the first time I ever met you."

"And you thought it pretty," answered Miss Tregunter, with a bright smile, hurrying thereafter, as ladies will, to a safer subject. "Can't you mark the winners for me, Mr. Egremont? Can't you tell me what I ought to back for the Cup?"

"It's not much in my line," answered Dolly, wishing for the moment he had sunk his whole patrimony in a string of racehorses; "but there's a man who can put you on a good thing," pointing to Cotherstone, who had shut his book, and was labouring through the mass of ladies on the lawn. "May I beckon him up here?" he asked Mrs. Vandeleur.

"Lord Cotherstone?" replied Norah. "Of course you may. He's a great friend of mine, though we never meet but twice a year. Does he see you? How lame he walks. We'll give him some luncheon. Here he is."

While she spoke the racing veteran tapped at the box-door, to be received with the *empressement* due to such an oracle, from whose lips every word that fell was worth at least a dozen pair of gloves.

"Hyacinth!" he exclaimed, in accents hoarse with the shouting of many meetings, to answer a timid suggestion from Miss Tregunter. "Don't you

believe it. Don't you back him, Mrs. Vandeleur. Let him alone, both of you. Yes, he's a good-looking one enough, and he's a smart horse for a mile; but he's no use here. He'll never get up the hill in a week. No back-ribs, and not very game when he's collared. I don't often give an opinion, but I bred him, you know, and I've got his form to a pound."

Miss Tregunter looked disappointed. Was it that she had taken a fancy to Hyacinth's beautiful shape, or because Dandy Burton, who always made up to her, with or without encouragement, now stepped into their box? or could she have disapproved of Dolly's conduct in taking advantage of the stir thus created, to whisper something for Mrs. Vandeleur's exclusive information? Something that made Norah turn deadly pale, and crumple to shreds the race-card in her hand.

It was a short sentence, and had Miss Tregunter heard it distinctly, would have interested her, I believe, but little.

Turning his back on the others, Dolly whispered in low, hurried syllables, "I have seen Gerard Ainslie. He is in London—very poor. You shall have his address this evening." Then, true to his kindly instincts, honest Dolly, sorely against his

inclination, quitted the box, leaving Dandy Burton literally "a fair field and no favour" with the heiress. That gentleman was called Dandy Burton still, and doubtless deserved the title honestly enough. He had left the Life Guards for some time, having found, indeed, that service far less to his taste than he imagined before he joined. Truth to tell, the Dandy was not quite a "good enough fellow" for the Household Brigade, with whom no amount of coxcombry will go down unless it conceals frank manliness of character beneath its harmless affectations. When Burton first made acquaintance with his new comrades, these did all in their power to train him into what soldiers call "the right sort of cornet." They quizzed his boots, they *crabbed* his riding, they corked his eyebrows, and they *made hay* in his room! But it was all to no purpose; and though they neither quarrelled with nor rendered him uncomfortable, everybody was satisfied he would not stop long. So after a year or two he sold out, to make way for a merry blue-eyed boy, fresh from Eton, who could do "thimble-rig," "prick the garter," "bones" with his face blacked, and various other accomplishments; who feared nothing, respected nobody on

earth, besides the colonel, but his own corporal-major, and suited the corps, as he himself expressed it, "down to the ground."

Burton's present profession, however, as the dandy "pure and simple," going about London, was far more to his taste than the military duties of Knightsbridge and Windsor. Not another of the "trade" was more beautifully dressed and turned out that day upon the course, and nobody could have been more satisfied of his correct appearance than himself.

"Unwisely weaves that takes two webbes in hand," says Spenser; but Burton, disregarding such wholesome advice, no sooner found himself in Mrs. Vandeleur's box, with old Cotherstone and the two ladies, than he proceeded to play the double game in which he believed himself a proficient. His admiration, and whatever little sentiment he could muster, were doubtless given to Mrs. Vandeleur. But he had a great idea of marrying the heiress. So, with an audacity that could only arise from utter ignorance of feminine nature, he began to "make running" with two women at the same time, who were fast friends, and neither of whom cared the least bit for him in her heart.

He tried Miss Tregunter first; but the young lady's eyes "were with her heart, and that was far away." They were following Dolly's broad form as it traversed the course, which was even now being cleared for the great race, and she vouchsafed not a single look to the Dandy. Then he engaged Mrs. Vandeleur, still exchanging last words with Lord Cotherstone, whose hand was on the door, and here he was less unfortunate. She turned more graciously towards him than usual.

"Will you do me a favour, Mr. Burton?" asked this White Witch, in her most seductive accents.

"What is there I would not do for you?" naturally answered the Dandy, modulating his voice, however so that Miss Tregunter should not hear.

"Thanks," replied Norah, with a bright smile. "Run down, please, amongst those noisy 'ring' people, and bet two hundred pounds for me against Hyacinth. Lord Cotherstone says it is 'two to one.' That means I shall win a hundred pounds, don't it?"

"Certainly," answered Burton, "if it comes off. I'll book it for you in five minutes."

"And—and—Mr. Burton," added the lady, with

the colour rising to her cheek and the light to her eyes, "Lord Cotherstone is a very good judge, isn't he? Will you do it twice over? I'm sure Hyacinth can't win."

So Burton walked solemnly down into the betting-ring, and laid four hundred to two against the favourite, while Mrs. Vandeleur, leaning back in her chair, shut her eyes for forty blissful seconds, thinking how by this time to-morrow Gerard Ainslie would have received a couple of hundred through a safe hand, anonymously, "from a friend."

Men are apt enough to be over-sanguine; but the amount of chickens counted by women, even before the eggs are laid, defies calculation.

People dropped in, and went out, but Norah heeded them very little, for the horses had already taken their canters, and were marshalled for the start. A pang of misgiving shot through her when Hyacinth went sweeping down, blooming like a rainbow and elastic as an eel.

"Why, he's as beautiful as the flower they call him by!" said Miss Tregunter.

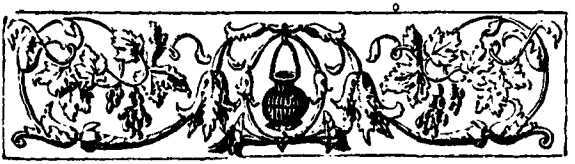
"Never mind," answered Norah; "Lord Cotherstone must know, and it's sure to be all right!"

I will not take upon me to describe this or any

other race for the Ascot Cup, inasmuch as the crowd has hitherto prevented my seeing any part of these contests but the last fifty yards. In the present instance the struggle at the hill was exceedingly severe; horses were changing their legs, while whip and spur were going a quarter of a mile from home. Hyacinth, however, who had been lying back till the distance, came out directly his jockey called on him, and won with apparent ease amidst shouts that might have been heard at Hyde Park Corner.

The ring were hit very hard, and Mrs. Vandeleur lost four hundred pounds! Burton, making his way back to her box, stumbled against Lord Cotherstone. The latter, of course, defended his own judgment in defiance of the event. "I told you the Porpoise wasn't fit," said he. "If they could have galloped Porpoise yesterday, Lifeboat would have made the running for him, and Hyacinth must have come in a bad third!"

The next person Dandy met was his old fellow-pupil; but Dolly seemed too preoccupied to answer the question put in a whisper by his friend, "What was it you said to her in the box that made Mrs. Vandeleur turn so pale?"



CHAPTER XV.

TIGHT SHOES.

Alas! that the misery of those pinches, proverbially unsuspected save by the wearer, should be confined to no particular style of *chaussure*, but prove as insupportable under satin sandal as waterproof boot. I doubt if Cinderella herself was thoroughly comfortable in her glass-slippers, and have always been persuaded that she kicked one of them off while leaving the ball-room, partly in excusable coquetry, and partly because it was too tight! With handsome Mrs. Vandeleur too, the White Rose of my story, the metaphorical shoe pinched very closely during the height of the London season in which Hyacinth earned his immortality as a race-horse by winning the Ascot Cup. It was a shoe, moreover, possessing the

peculiar property of misfitting chiefly on Monday mornings, at monthly intervals, when she paid her household accounts, looked into her expenditure, and found that even her liberal fortune was insufficient to make both ends meet. This inconvenience might be accounted for in many ways. The prettiest house in London is not likely to be hired at a low rent; good taste in furniture cannot be indulged without lavish expenditure; if people insist on giving charming little dinners of eight two or three times a week, cooks' wages and wine-merchants' accounts soon run into units, tens, hundreds, not to mention "bills delivered" by poulterers, pickle-makers, and purveyors of good things "round the corner;" high-stepping horses are seldom attainable under three figures, and Mr. Barker, as indeed his name would seem to imply, opens his mouth rather wide when he builds, repairs, paints, varnishes, or otherwise refits the carriages he turns out so effectually. Add to these luxuries of life such necessaries as bonnets, ball-dresses, bracelets, and other jewellery to wear or give away; take boxes at the Opera, and join water-parties at Richmond whenever the whim seizes yourself or friends; be careful to abstain from nothing that

charms the fancy or pleases the eye; never pay your bills till the end of the second year, and I will take upon me to predict you will soon find the shoe so tight, that the difficulty is how to get it off at all.

What a pretty little shoe it was with which Mrs. Vandeleur kicked away the footstool under her writing-table, ere she rose to refresh herself with a look in the glass, after poring over her accounts! What a beautiful face she saw there, pale indeed, and with its hair pushed far back after an hour's bewildering study, but lit up by a smile that it had not shown for years, that reminded even herself of the Norah Welby winding silks on the lawn at Marston, under the summer lime-trees, long ago!

"It's a bore too!" she murmured, "and what I hate is being mixed up in money matters with a man. But I can always manage somehow, and then, poor fellow! I like to think I have made him tolerably comfortable. How he must wonder! and it's too nice of dear fat Dolly to manage it all so cleverly. Gracious! that reminds me, the fancy-ball is to-morrow, and I've never written to Jane!" So she sprang back to her table, bundled the pile of

accounts into a drawer, where it would take at least an hour's work to arrange them for inspection on some future occasion, and spreading a sheet of note-paper, smooth, sweet-scented, and crested with a monogram like a centipede, scrawled off the following effusion :—"I am in despair, darling, about missing you—I waited at home all the morning, and begin to fear now some bother has prevented your getting away. I have heaps of business to talk over, but long to see you besides on your own account, that you may tell me all about yourself—we shall meet to-morrow, so nobody must find out you came here so lately—the disguise is perfect! and I am sure will answer our purpose. Are we not dreadfully deceitful? but when people pry, and gossip, and try to sound one's servants, it seems all fair. Don't answer, please! it might create suspicion—Ever your loving Norah Vandeleur." While she signed her name, Miss Tregunter and luncheon were announced simultaneously. Mrs. Vandeleur pushing the note hastily aside, ran out to meet her friend on the stairs, and turn her back for that meal, which is, with ladies, the most important in the day.

So down they sat in the pretty dining-room, to

demolish roast chicken and light claret, while they talked volubly of their own doings and their friends, with as little reserve as if Robert Smart, and his confederate, faultlessly powdered, were a couple of mutes; or the portly butler, who condescended to pour them out their wine (wondering the while how they could drink such thin stuff), was ignorant of all social scandal, and averse to disseminating it, betraying thereby but a superficial acquaintance with the character of that domestic. Presently, Jane Tregunter, eating jelly with grapes stuck in it, and wearying perhaps of others' love affairs, began gradually to work round in the direction of her own. "You'll go, dear," said this young lady affectionately; "you promised, and I know you are to be trusted. I shouldn't like to be disappointed, I own. You see I——I've never been at a fancy ball."

"I was writing to you about it when you arrived," answered Norah: "now I may tear my letter up, for it don't matter. Disappoint you, dear! Why should you think I would? I've done everything about the dresses—I'm certain nobody will know us. You've no idea what a difference powder makes, and it's so becoming! I shall be very much surprised, Jane,

if somebody don't collapse altogether. I think to-morrow will be an eventful evening."

"Patches, and a pink satin petticoat," mused Miss Tregunter, "it does sound very pretty, Norah; but nobody will look at me," she added, honestly enough, "if we're both dressed alike."

"That is your modesty!" answered Mrs. Vandeleur heartily. "I'm an old woman, you know, now, and my staunchest admirers are getting tired of me. Even Mr. Egremont has deserted my standard this season. Don't you think so, Jane?"

Jane blushed, and looked pleased. Perhaps it was not exclusively love for her hostess that made her so happy in Mrs. Vandeleur's house. The latter was an old and sincere friend of Dolly's—no rival, though sometimes feared as such for an instant at a time, and a capital go-between. Miss Tregunter swallowed her jelly, wiped her mouth, and walked round the table to give the White Rose a kiss, an operation witnessed by Robert, who entered at that moment to change her plate, without eliciting the slightest token of surprise.

"You're very good to me, Norah," said she affectionately, "and I think you guess something. I'm not sure whether your guess is right, but I don't

mind telling you I should not be angry if it was. What makes you think, dear, that somebody,—well —that Mr. Egremont will be at the fancy ball?"

"Because I'm not blind, my dear," answered Mrs. Vandeleur; "no more is he—I think he is quite right, and I think you will be quite wrong if you snub him. Depend upon it he's worth a dozen of the other one!"

Miss Tregunter looked puzzled. "What other one?" she asked; "do you mean Mr. Burton, Norah? don't you like Mr. Burton?"

On the tip of Mrs. Vandeleur's tongue was a frank disclaimer, but she remembered, with a twinge of dissatisfaction, how this gentleman had of late been concerned in several money matters on her account—how he had made bets for her at Tattersall's, gambled for her in railway shares, and speculated with her money or his own, she was not quite sure which, in one or two unremunerative ventures east of Temple Bar; also, how they met continually in public, while he called at her house nearly every day, so she could not consistently give vent to the truth, which was that she wished him at the bottom of the sea.

"Like him, dear," she repeated with a hesitation

so foreign to her usual frank outspoken manner as to puzzle Miss Tregunter more and more; "well, I like him, and I don't like him. I think he's very disagreeable sometimes, but then you know he's such an old acquaintance—I've known him so long, and he's exceedingly obliging—altogether——"

"Norah, dear," interrupted her friend, with unusual energy, "you won't be affronted at what I'm going to say. I've often wanted to speak about it, but I never had courage. Take my advice, and keep clear of Mr. Burton. I don't know the world so well as you do, but I know him. He makes up to me, dear, awfully! and I hate him for it! It's only because I've some money. I'll tell you how I found that out some day. So different from the other. Norah, dear, don't be angry! People are beginning to talk about you and him. Aunt Margaret told Theresa you were in love with him, and even deaf old Lady Baker made her repeat the whole story, and said she knew there was some truth in it, for he was never out of the house. I was so angry I could have thumped them, Theresa and all! I thought I'd tell you, and if you're offended I shall cry for a week—there! And if he knew it, I do believe he'd poison me in a straw-

berry-ice to-morrow evening; there's no crime that man would stick at, if he was sure of not being found out. Hush! talk of the—Dandy! Now I'll run away, dear—you're not angry, I see—good-bye, darling, and take care of yourself."

So Miss Tregunter made her escape from the ground floor, while Mrs. Vandeleur went up-stairs, to confront the gentleman of whom her friend held so unflattering an opinion, in the drawing-room, to which apartment he had been shown by Mr. Smart, ere that well-drilled servant announced his arrival to the ladies below. For the first time in her life Norah met her visitor with some little feeling of vexation and constraint. Hitherto she had considered him a moderately pleasant but decidedly useful acquaintance, had ignored his selfishness, smiled at his vanity, and tolerated him contentedly enough; but to-day, something in her woman's nature rose in fierce rebellion against the assumption of intimacy, the affectation of more than friendly interest she was conscious he displayed. Every woman, I believe, likes to be made love to, until her heart is engaged elsewhere, and then, with a fine sense of justice, she turns round and resents as an insult the admiration hitherto gra-

ciously accepted as a tribute to her sovereignty. It is but fair, however, to say, that Norah had never yet detected in Mr. Burton's manner anything warmer than the cordiality of long-established friendship. It was Jane Tregunter's appeal that to-day, for the first time, put the possibility of his presumption into her head, and she felt she disliked him extremely, although he had saved her so much trouble in business matters, nay, even although he had been educated by the same private tutor as Gerard Ainslie!

He came quickly across the room when she entered, masking, as it seemed, some confusion under a gayer manner than usual. "How well you look!" he exclaimed, taking her hand with a good deal of *empressement*. "You grow more beautiful every day. I came to talk business, and you put it all out of my head."

She liked him none the better for the vapid compliment. It had not the ring of the true metal, and perhaps she would have valued it no more had it been sterling gold. Sitting down a long way off, she answered icily enough.

"If you come on business, let us get it over at once, for my carriage is ordered in ten minutes. If you

want to talk nonsense," she added, thinking she was rather severe, "you are too late—Miss Tregunter is just gone, and it's thrown away upon me."

"Miss Tregunter," replied the Dandy, in a tone of assumed disgust, "who would ever think of Miss Tregunter in comparison with you?" but observing a peculiar expression of scorn about Norah's eyebrows, he added judiciously, "My business will soon be over, and you can go for your drive. Here are the bills; you can look through them at your leisure. I am afraid, as a matter of form, I must ask you for a receipt."

She crossed to the writing-table. "How very odd!" said she, rummaging over its littered surface. "I'm certain I left it here. What can have become of it? Never mind. It isn't wanted after all, for Jane has been. There's the receipt, Mr. Burton. Is it dated right? I haven't half thanked you for your trouble; and now tell me when do you think this money will have to be paid?"

He had turned away nervously while she was at the writing-table, but he forced himself to look her straight in the face. "When?" he repeated. "Why, after Goodwood—we shall win a hatful of money on the Stakes, and I've let the Cup alone, because I

don't see my way. You've no idea what an interest I feel in the thing, now that I have a real inducement to success."

She felt she was in a false position, and she hated it. She knew she was deeply involved, and that it would take more than a year's income to free herself from her obligations to Dandy Burton. It was provoking, irritating beyond measure, but not humiliating, because she had sacrificed her independence for his comfort, whom she must never see again, but whom she still so dearly loved. "And if I lose at Goodwood," said she, pondering, "these people won't wait?"

"They must! they shall!" answered the Dandy, vehemently; "don't be anxious—don't distress yourself, dear Mrs. Vandeleur; trust to me; there is nothing in the world I wouldn't do for you!"

She thanked him coldly enough. It was getting worse and worse, she thought. Her servant came in to say the carriage was at the door, and in common decency her visitor could stay no longer, but he bowed over her hand, when she wished him goodbye, till his lips almost touched it, and Norah's sensitive perceptions detected in his manner a bold confidence, an assured air of success, that angered

her to the core. Running up-stairs to put on her bonnet, she struck her clenched hand hard against the banisters, a display of temper very unusual, and denoting that she was deeply moved. She gave a little sigh of relief though, when the street-door closed, and proceeded calmly enough to make her afternoon toilette.

Burton, emerging on the pavement, took a paper from his pocket, and after reading it with rather a strange smile, bestowed it carefully in his note-case. This paper had no address, but was written in Norah Vandeleur's bold and somewhat straggling hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

NON CUIVIS.

It was getting late in the afternoon, and high time for the Park, if he meant to go there at all; so Mr. Burton straightened his waist, looked admiringly at his boots, and proceeded into the Park by way of Albert Gate, with that air of supreme indifference and imperturbable equanimity affected by his order towards sundown. No wonder a frank jovial manner is so highly appreciated in London; no wonder the free, kindly, energetic character called a "cheery fellow" should be so popular. Refreshing as it is rare, his pleasant greeting puts you in good humour with yourself, with him, with things in general, with the score of friends in particular, whom you had almost voted a minute ago the twenty greatest bores in the world!

But the Dandy's "form," as Lord Cotherstone would have said, was hardly good enough to admit of his being perfectly natural; it was his custom therefore to intrench himself in an impenetrable and rather contemptuous reserve, which imposed on the public and answered its purpose remarkably well.

Mediocrity, you see, if you will only be proud of it, cultivating it assiduously like any other advantage, possesses a certain inert force of its own. Everybody knows people accept you for what you say you are worth, and if you never attempt to succeed, of course you need never fail. It is so easy then, and so agreeable, sitting far back amongst the equestrian benches, to criticise the gladiators in the arena below, depreciating this one's courage, and that one's bearing, and the wretched fighting of a third, inferring, by implication, how much better you could do it all yourself, were it but worth while to try. Something of this principle had carried Burton hitherto successfully enough through the world in which he moved. Walking up the Ride now, well-dressed, well-looking, well-mannered, he obtained his full share of bows and smiles from thorough-bred women sweeping by on thorough-

bred horses—of familiar nods, and "how-d'ye-do's" from lords, guardsmen, light-dragoons, and dandies of various calibres; but none of the ladies looked back at him, after they had passed; none of the men hooked him familiarly by the arm, and turned him round to walk him fifty yards in the direction they were themselves going, for the mere pleasure of his society.

He saw Lady Featherbrain's bay horse stand with its head over the rails, at least a quarter of an hour, while its beautiful rider argued and gesticulated and talked with eyes, hands, shoulders, and *chignon*, at a dried-up, wizened, sunburned man, leaning on an umbrella to listen imperturbably while he smoked a cigar. When Burton passed, he took off his hat, as in duty bound, and her ladyship, who couldn't, for the life of her, help looking at every man as if she doted on him, smiled sweetly in return; but that was all. What was there in Jack Thoroughpin, thought the Dandy, thus to monopolise the prettiest woman in the Ride? He was anything but good-looking; he was past forty; he was ruined; but he remembered hearing one or two strange reckless escapades of which Jack had been the hero. It was quite true that he jumped

into a life-boat last winter, when none of the crew would volunteer; and though he had spent two fortunes, had they not both been sacrificed at the shrine of an unwise, unhappy, and impossible attachment? There was a vein of pure gold, no doubt, underlying the crust of worldliness round Jack Thoroughpin's heart; and Lady Featherbrain was woman enough to find it out.

So Burton walked on pondering, till a little farther up the Ride he met young Lord Glaramara, a man with whom, for many reasons, it would have suited him to have been on the most intimate terms. Glaramara's shooting in Westmoreland, his stable at Melton, his drag in London, his cook, his cellar, his hospitality, were all irreproachable. He was buying yearlings, too, and seemed keen about racing, but as yet not a feather had been plucked from the pigeon's wing. A more eligible friend could not be conceived, and it was provoking that he should pass the Dandy with no warmer greeting than a careless nod, his whole attention engrossed by the man with whom he was walking arm-in-arm —a fat man, with a white hat, a red neckcloth, no gloves, and, yes,—he could not be mistaken— a cotton umbrella! having, moreover, as he bitterly

reflected, no earthly merit, but that he once made a good speech in the House of Commons, and was the best racket-player in England.

It took more than one downward glance at his own faultless attire to restore the Dandy's equanimity after this last shock; nor was he yet in the best of tempers, when he came face to face with his old companion, Dolly Egremont, leaning back against the rail, smoking in short nervous whiffs, while he glanced uncomfortably from side to side, with an anxiety and preoccupation quite foreign to his usual air of good-humoured content.

This, you see, was Miss Tregunter's day for riding, at five o'clock, and Dolly was watching to see her pass. The vigil seemed in many respects to partake of the nature of a penance. People in love are sometimes very happy, I believe, but their normal state is, doubtless, one of considerable worry and restlessness, best described by the familiar expression, Fidget!

He was glad, though, to meet the Dandy. These two had kept up their boyish friendship, and it is due to Burton to say that although he would not have hesitated at sacrificing Dolly to his own interest, he liked him better than any of the acquaintances he had made later in life.

Mr. Egremont seemed not only more abstracted, but graver than usual. "I am glad to find you here, Dandy," said he, removing the cigar from his mouth. "I wanted to talk to you about an old friend of ours. We must give him a lift between us. I'll do all I can. Have a weed."

Burton accepted the proffered refreshment, lit his cigar, and nodded.

"It's about poor Jerry," continued Dolly, still glancing from side to side for the flutter of a certain blue habit on a chestnut horse, but warming to his subject nevertheless. "What do you think? He's turned up. He's in London. I've seen him. You've no idea how he's altered. Poor Jerry! What a good-looking chap he used to be when we were at Archer's. Don't you remember Fanny What's-her-name?—the girl at the mill? Well, here he is, after knocking about all over the world. He hasn't a shilling. We must do something for him."

The Dandy had listened with as little expression of interest as if they had been talking about the weather, smoking placidly the while. He roused himself now to observe languidly—

"How? I don't see why?—what do you propose to do?"

"We mustn't let him starve," replied Dolly indignantly. "I thought you and I between us might make some sort of provision for him in the meantime, till we can get him employment."

"As a crossing-sweeper, do you mean?" asked Burton. "I don't believe I've interest even for that. Go as low as you will, the supply seems greater than the demand."

"Every door is barred with gold, and opens but to golden keys;
Still, I don't despair. I'll think it over, if you please,"

replied Dolly musingly. "Well, you'll help him, at any rate, if you can."

To promise costs nothing, so Burton readily engaged himself thus far, and Dolly proceeded in more hopeful tones—

"I knew I could count upon his old friends. After all, people are much better than the world gives them credit for. I could tell you of one who has behaved like a trump, only I am not sure whether I ought, and perhaps she wouldn't like anybody to know."

Honest Dolly, admiring it extremely, was burning to trumpet forth Mrs. Vandeleur's generosity to the world in general.

"She!" answered Burton. "Ah! if it's a She, have no scruples. Never keep faith with a woman, nor break it with a man. That's the fundamental principle that holds society together. I tell you, my dear fellow, they like being deceived. Hang me, if I don't think they like being shown up! At least they always seem to do it for themselves if you're too cautious to do it for 'em. Out with it, Dolly; who's the Lady Bountiful?"

"I know you don't mean what you say, and I feel safe in telling you," answered Dolly, "because you are one of *us*. It's Mrs. Vandeleur, Dandy. That's the best woman in Europe!"

"There are not many to choose from," answered Burton, in his most imperturbable tones, and keeping down with an effort the expression he feared would rise to his face, as of one who had just been dealt "four-by-honours" in his hand. "Let's take a turn amongst the carriages, Dolly. I can't see from here whether any of *our* admirers have arrived or not." So speaking he linked his arm in his friend's, and the two sauntered leisurely across the Ride towards a double line of carriages drawn up under the trees.

Dolly was nothing loth. He had watched like

a patient deer-stalker long enough in one place, and thought it time to change his post. Also, he was a little angry—men always are when disappointed—because chance had been against him to-day. With the noble sense of justice and logical sagacity peculiar to the position, he blamed Miss Tregunter severely for missing him in a crowd of five hundred people, convinced that she could have changed her whole sentiments and forgotten him in the twelve hours that had elapsed since he saw her last.

So absorbed was Mr. Egremont in such uncomfortable reflections, that he was nearly ridden over by the lady of his affections herself, who was looking for him, truth to tell, on the footway, and, quick-sighted as women generally are in such matters, failed to detect him immediately under her horse's nose. He thought she did it on purpose, and turned pale with vexation, leaving the Park forthwith, and excusing himself to his friend, by pleading the necessity of dressing for an early dinner. Burton, on the contrary, had observed the whole performance, puffing tranquilly at his cigar the while, resolved to take advantage of this, as of all other chances in the game. Watching, therefore, the

turn of the tide, he stopped Miss Tregunter, as she drifted back, so to speak, with the ebb, walking her horse listlessly in the direction from which she had started, and wondering in her heart what had become of Dolly Egremont.

You see, though these young people had made no actual assignation in so many words, there had been a sort of tacit agreement that they should meet at this hour in this place. Their attachment, too, had bloomed to that degree of maturity at which jealousy has already been kindled, while mutual confidence is not yet established; so, mistrusting each other considerably, they spent a good deal of time unpleasantly enough, attributing unworthy motives to the necessary and commonplace doings of daily life.

Miss Tregunter, reining up the chestnut horse to converse with her professed admirer, Mr. Burton, felt sufficiently piqued at Dolly's fancied negligence to punish herself and him at one stroke; so she affected great pleasure in thus meeting the Dandy, and beamed down on him from her ascendancy of fifteen hands and a half with a fascinating coquetry, that, like the rest of her sex, she could put on as easily as a double lace veil.

The Dandy accepted all such advances with laudable equanimity. He believed them only his due; but in the present instance he "meant business," as he called it, and responded more warmly than usual. Straightening her horse's mane with a caressing hand, he looked up in her face, and regretted, mournfully, that "she had dropped her old friends, and he never saw her now."

"Whose fault is that?" replied the lady. "I suppose you don't expect me to drive down to White's and ask those stupid waiters if Mr. Burton is in the club. Be quiet, Tomboy!"—for Tomboy, whisking his well-bred tail, was kicking sharply at a fly behind his girths.—"No, I'm like the fairy in the song, 'those that would see me must search for me well.'"

"I thought fairies were ugly old women on crutches," answered the Dandy. "You've not grown very ugly yet. Well, '*qui cherche trouve*,' I suppose. Shall you be in the Park to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" repeated Miss Tregunter. "Certainly not. To-morrow's Sunday. I don't believe you can count the days of the week. But I shall ride on Monday at twelve; and as I know

you can't get up till two, my movements need not affect you one way or the other."

So saying, Miss Tregunter cantered off, a little ashamed of herself, as well she might be, and wishing, before the chestnut was settled in his stride, that she had not allowed *pique* so to get the better of her as to make her disloyal, in word or manner, for one moment, to the man she loved.

Burton looked after her, whistled softly, smiled, shook his head, put his cigar in his mouth again, and strolled on.

"I believe that would be my best game now," he said to himself. "She really *is* a catch; there's such a lot of ready money. I always thought she liked Dolly best till to-day. But there's no accounting for their fancies, and I might win on the post after all! And yet—and yet—if I could have the pick of the basket, and need only please myself, it's not you, with your red cheeks, Miss Janey, that I would choose."

I need hardly say the Dandy was not romantic, and a sentiment, so foreign to his practical nature, died out almost as soon as it arose, long before he could reach the vision from which it took its birth.

That vision was but the glimpse of a pale proud face in a light transparent bonnet, looking like a pearl of great price among its surroundings, making them seem but mosaic and tawdry jewellery in comparison. A face such as passes before weary, wicked, world-worn men in their dreams, reminding them in its beauty of the purer, holier feelings their waking hours never know; of love, and hope, and trust, of the "better part" they put away in wilful blindness long ago, and can never share again.

It fleeted swiftly by, that winsome delicate face, in an open carriage with a pair of high-stepping horses, driven by a body-coachman, portly in girth, and rubicund of aspect, well worthy of the name, to be drawn up in a shady spot under the elms, whereto the Dandy picked his way jauntily, for whether she encouraged him or not, it was worth while to appear before the world on terms of easy intimacy with handsome Mrs. Vandeleur.

The White Rose could not be long in any one place on a sunny afternoon without finding herself surrounded by a swarm of summer-insects. Half-a-dozen of the best-dressed and best-looking young gentlemen in the Park were about her carriage

when the Dandy arrived. It stung her to the quick to observe that they all made way for him, as if he, forsooth, had a better right than others to monopolise her society and engross her conversation; she bowed, therefore, with marked coldness, and turned her head to talk to a pretty boy, fresh from Eton, on the other side of the carriage.

But the Dandy thought he had got more than one pull over her now, and determined she should feel it, so he laid his hand on her arm to arrest her attention; and, regardless of the angry gesture with which she shook it off, observed in a tone of confidential intimacy—

"I have just heard something that concerns us; I want to talk it over with you, as soon as possible."

She turned a very haughty face upon him while she replied—

"More business, Mr. Burton? I should have thought you and I had bored one another enough for one day. I can answer for myself, at least!"

The listeners could not forbear smiling, and the late Etonian laughed outright. Two hours after he told his neighbour at the Blues' mess, how "It was a regular 'nose-ender' for the Dandy, and he was glad of it!"

Burton lost his temper for once, and his vantage-ground with it.

"If you choose to trust me with your business matters, Mrs. Vandeleur," said he, shortly, "I must talk them over with you. I have spent three mornings in the City on your affairs, within the last fortnight, so you see the trouble is not all one way."

"Don't be afraid," she retorted scornfully, "you shall be paid your commission. Half-a-crown in the pound, I think, isn't it? Sir Henry, will you kindly tell my coachman to go home?"

But before that thoroughly respectable servant could start his horses, Burton had recovered himself, and fired a parting shot.

"Don't think I mind the trouble," said he, calling up a most affectionate expression of countenance, and leaning well into the carriage. "After all, we're partners, are we not? We must stand or fall together, and your interests are the same as mine!"

I am afraid Mrs. Vandeleur shed some bitter tears that evening before she went to dress for dinner. She had plenty of courage, the White Rose, and seldom gave way, but she longed for somebody to cherish and protect her now, somebody who would not have suffered her to be placed in

such a false position, somebody whose voice used to be music, his glance sunshine, his presence safety. It was cruel, cruel to think she ought never to see him now!

CHAPTER XVII.

SHINING RIVER.

GERARD had been working hard for some weeks, so the play was nearly ready for rehearsal. He was very sick of it too, and began to think he owed himself a little relaxation. Money matters, also, were no longer so difficult a subject as formerly, thanks to the supplies received from an unknown source through Dolly Egremont. That gentleman, while professing and indeed displaying great interest in his former fellow-pupil, obstinately declined to furnish the slightest clue to the discovery of his benefactor, and Gerard, with an enforced philosophy, made up his mind he had better sit down contented to enjoy "the goods the gods provided."

Dolly too had determined upon taking a day's pleasure over and above his ordinary allowance in

the week. He was restless and preoccupied, therefore more prone than usual to excitement. A state of hot water was quite foreign to his easy-going habits, and made him uncomfortable; more, it made him unhappy.

Miss Tregunter seemed a puzzle that grew day by day more difficult to explain. Her honest admirer, unskilled in the ways of women, could not make head or tail of her behaviour. He remembered long ago, how pleased she used to be when they met, how frank and cordial was her manner, how unrestrained her mirth. Now she never seemed to look him straight in the face. She avoided him in company, and appeared actually afraid to be left alone with him.

Afraid! And he would have laid down his life for her with pleasure on any door-step in London! So he argued that she was tired of him, offended with him, hated him, and in this hasty conclusion, showed, I think, considerable ignorance of those intricate channels he had undertaken to navigate.

Now, Dolly, who apart from the influence of his lady-love was an open-hearted convivial fellow enough, had given an entertainment some few weeks

before to the members of his company at the Accordion—an entertainment which, beginning with a dinner and ending with a dance, had afforded unlimited satisfaction to those invited; but unfortunately some half dozen of the corps had been prevented from attending, by a summons to assist at the private theatricals of a great lady twenty miles from London.

Miss Carmine, Mr. Belgrave, with certain other dramatic celebrities, had thus missed their share of the manager's hospitalities, and Dolly thought he could not do better than invite these absentees to a quiet little entertainment at Richmond, where they might enjoy sunshine, scenery, eating, drinking, smoking, boating, and flirting, to their hearts' content. It was a good opportunity, he told Gerard, for the author to become acquainted with some of those talented individuals who were to clothe the sketches of his brain in living reality, and insisted on his being present.

Gerard Ainslie, after much debate in his own mind, had resolved to devote that particular day to another peep at Mrs. Vandeleur. He hungered, poor fellow, to see her again, nay, to feel the touch of her hand, to hear the sound of her voice once

more, and he had hardened his heart to go and call upon her at her own house. For this purpose he dressed himself as well as his now replenished wardrobe would admit, and leaving the Richmond question open, proceeded early in the afternoon to knock at her door, devoutly hoping the summons might not be answered by his former acquaintance, Mr. Robert Smart. So far, fortune favoured him; the portly butler, who was on the eve of stepping round to his club, kindly informing him that Mrs. Vandeleur was "not at home," and adding, in the plenitude of his good-humour, the further statement that "she had gone down to Richmond, and wouldn't be back till the evening."

To Richmond! He hesitated no longer. Shutting his eyes to its obvious improbability, he even cherished a hope that he might find her one of the party he was about to join. For a moment life looked as bright as when he was nineteen, and in less than an hour he had torn off half his return ticket, and was running like a boy up the wooden steps of Richmond station.

At the Castle he asked for Mr. Egremont's party, and was ushered on to the lawn, where he found a bevy of sauntering, over-dressed ladies, waiting im-

patiently for dinner, but nothing like Norah's stately figure, and pale beautiful face, look where he would.

His heart turned sick, this rough, gold-digging adventurer, like some weak girl disappointed in her silly romantic dream. What a sham it all looked! Even the golden sunshine and the sparkling river seemed to partake of the foil and tinsel, and gas-light of the stage.

"We had almost given you up, Gerard," said Dolly's cheerful voice, as his host emerged on the lawn from one of the side-rooms and took him kindly by the arm. "Dinner's just ready. This way, Mrs. Golightly. This way, Miss White. Belgrave, bring up the rest of the ladies. Ainslie, will you sit by Miss Carmine? Take the covers off, waiter—turtle—all right! Shut that door and put the lemon on the table. Mrs. Golightly, clear, or thick? Have both!"

Gerard, recovering his equanimity, glanced round the table at his new friends. Miss Carmine, sitting next to him, was not half so pretty as he expected, and a good deal older than she looked on the stage. Lydia Goddard and Jessie White seemed merry, sparkling girls, with more than their share of comeliness, but Mrs. Golightly, who sat opposite,

oppressed him from the first with sensations of astonishment and awe. Somebody must have told her she was like Mrs. Siddons, and her dignity of manner was, in consequence, crushing. The *mère noble*, as French people call it, was obviously her part, and very well she played it, even while eating whitebait at a Richmond dinner.

Actors and actresses seem the only artists who are never ashamed of "talking shop." They glory in their profession, and why should they not? Miss Carmine, stealing a good look at Gerard, and approving of what she saw, soon embarked on the favourite subject.

"So you're writing us a play, Mr. Ainslie," said the accomplished actress, her features waking into beauty when she spoke. "You see we know all about it. You men can't keep a secret, clever as you think yourselves."

"I'm only proud you should take an interest in it," answered Gerard, courteously. "I wish I could write something more worthy of the acting."

Lydia Goddard looked up from a lobster *rissole*, and Jessie White desisted from her occupation of making faces at Mr Belgrave. There was something in the tone of his voice that was sweet to a

woman's ear, and they acknowledged the charm, just as Fanny Draper had acknowledged it to her ruin and his, long ago.

Even Mrs. Golightly bent her brows on him with qualified approval.

"It is a responsibility, young sir," said the stately lady. "I am glad you acknowledge its gravity. Our time and talents are too precious to be wasted on the vague wanderings of incompetency. Said I well, mine host?"

"Of course you did," answered Dolly, waking up from a brown study, for he too felt the oppression of Mrs. Golightly.

> "Breathes there the man with soul so dead,
> That never to himself hath said,
> An actor's part becomes his bread?

I've seen a good deal of the manuscript, and like it. I can tell you, ladies and gentlemen, we haven't had such a thing out for years. Waiter—champagne!"

"You've written a very effective part for me, I'm told," said Miss Carmine aside, looking softly at her neighbour out of her eloquent eyes. "You don't know how grateful I am to people who take such pains on my behalf."

"I should think *you* could carry off the weakest style of writing," answered Gerard gallantly, feeling nevertheless a little out of his element, "you need only come to the front and say boh! to him, to make a goose of the wisest of us."

"That's nonsense," observed Mrs. Golightly in imperial tones, but Miss Carmine would not hear her, and turned with a pleased face on the host.

"I like the idea of Violante immensely," said she, fixing Dolly in his turn with a charming smile; "it's exactly my style, you know; I quite long to begin studying it."

The manager fidgeted uneasily in his chair. He was in trouble already about this confounded drama, which he had accepted, after all, only to do Gerard a kindness. If the American actress came over, of course she would insist on playing Violante; then Miss Carmine would take huff, and there was sure to be a row! "It's not all beer and skittles managing a theatre," thought Dolly, but he held up his glass to be filled, and looked as pleasant as he could.

"You've got some nice words for poor me, haven't you, Mr. Ainslie," said Jessie White, imploringly and coquettishly too, from the other end of the table.

"And I'm to be a page, in blue and white and

spangles!" added Miss Goddard, clapping her hands with innocent glee, like a child of five-and-twenty, as she was. "Belgrave has been telling me all about it. Mind you give me plenty of business, there's a good fellow, and as close to the foot-lights as you can!"

"I've done my very best for both of you," answered Gerard, bowing over the glass in his hand, "and I can alter your parts till they fit you like your dresses," he added, congratulating himself that he had not written a word for either of them, the while.

"Isn't he a duck?" whispered Jessie White to Miss Goddard; and "Ain't you a goose?" answered the practical Lydia. "Why, Jessie, you little idiot, he's old enough to be your father!"

Mrs. Golightly cleared her voice portentously.

"I have yet to learn," said she, glaring at the hapless author, "how far Mr. Ainslie has sacrificed the interests of art to the paltry exigences of our modern school; to what extent the dialogue, the situations, the characters, and the plot tend to develop our object in the abstract idea of tragedy. What, sir, do you conceive *is* our object in the abstract idea of tragedy?"

This was a poser for Gerard. Fortunately Mr. Barrington Belgrave came to his rescue.

"There isn't a morsel of bad business in the whole of it," said he, dogmatically; "every one of us from first to last has enough to do and to spare. No claret, thank you, Mr. Egremont,—coffee?—if you please. Mrs. Golightly and ladies, may I ask your keyind permission to indulge in a cigar?"

As soon as smoking began, it was but natural that the little party should adjourn to the lawn, and break itself up into small knots of two and three. Jessie White and Lydia Goddard, after an ineffectual pounce at the author, contented themselves with Mr. Belgrave and a grave man, hitherto very silent, who was great in low comedy. Mrs. Golightly secured the manager, and Gerard Ainslie, as being in a certain sense the lion of the party, fell to the lot of Kate Carmine.

She seemed pleased with the arrangement, conversing volubly and pleasantly enough, while they walked round and round the gravel-walk; her companion puffing thoughtfully at his cigar, and thinking how fragrant was the scent of the June roses, how fair the tinted glories of the evening sky—how calm and tranquil the broad river, glowing in

a crimson flush of sunset; how full of tender memories, and vanished hopes, and longings for the impossible, that parting hour, which may well be called "the sweet of the summer's day!"

What a world it might have been! And here he was, after a noisy dinner, talking London scandal with an actress!

She seemed to know everybody, and all about everything that was going on. She was amusing too, and related with considerable fun the last scrape into which Lady Featherbrain had inadvertently fallen, the domestic difference between the Ringdoves, and Mrs. Ringdove's unanswerable reasons for insisting on a separation, the late bill-discounting business brought to a climax by Hyacinth's winning the Ascot Cup, with the names of half a dozen noblemen and gentlemen, extremely pleasant people, and particular friends of her own, who were likely to disappear in consequence.

A light breeze sighed through the elms on the other side of the river. Miss Carmine was seized with a romantic desire to make a little expedition on the water.

"Mr. Ainslie," said she, in her most winning accents, "don't let us waste such a heavenly even-

ing; the train is not till ten. Why shouldn't you pull—I mean, *scull*—me about a little before we go back to London?"

"Willingly," answered Gerard, ready to go up in a balloon, or do anything anybody proposed, now that he had finished his cigar. "Down these steps, Miss Carmine. Take care of your dress in the mud—one foot on the thwarts—sit in the middle—that's it! Never mind the rudder; we don't want it, nor the waterman. Hand us that right-hand scull. That's a smart chap! Now shove off!"

Thus, by an energetic push from a one-eyed boatman, the light skiff, with an end of Miss Carmine's scarf trailing over the side, was fairly launched on the bosom of the Thames.

"Am I quite safe?" smiled the actress, and it was marvellous how much of beauty she could call at will into her smile. "Can I trust myself with you, Mr. Ainslie, or shall we both come to grief?"

He answered with pardonable vanity, and perhaps more literally than she expected—

"I have pulled a whale-boat in the Pacific and paddled a canoe on Lake Huron. You needn't fear an upset, Miss Carmine. I could swim with you,

I believe, from here to London Bridge if the tide served!"

"What a life yours must have been!" said the lady, appearing deeply interested; "so exciting, so romantic! I am so fond of adventurers and adventures! I wish you would tell me all yours."

"What, from the beginning?" answered Gerard, sculling lustily against stream. "You are prepared, then, to stay out all night? I've had a good many years of it. I'm an old man now."

"Old!" expostulated Miss Carmine. "Why, you're barely thirty"—reflecting that she herself was a good bit past that age. "No, just give me a rough sketch of your life. It amuses, it instructs me! When did you go abroad? What made you leave England? Was it—was it—disappointment?"

She looked down after she spoke, and watched the ripple of the boat through the water. It was very prettily done—very prettily indeed. What Gerard might have replied we shall never learn, for a hoarse voice at the very nose of his boat shouted, not uncivilly, to know "where he was a-comin' to?" And a scull, shifted as quickly as his own, allowed another skiff to glide past them down-

stream, with about eighteen inches interval. In that boat, pulled by an ancient mariner of Teddington, sat a lady and gentleman. The pale face of the former flashed upon Gerard Ainslie's eyes like a vision, for it was none other than Mrs. Vandeleur! Not altered—no, except that it seemed to him more beautiful than ever—not altered by a single line from the Norah Welby of Marston, from the ideal of womanly perfection and purity and grace that he had carried in his heart through all those years of toil, danger, sorrow, and privation. He had hoped to see her to-day—but not like this.

Had she recognised him? He could not tell. The boat sped so fast down-stream under the waterman's long, powerful strokes, and the twilight was already darkening into night. Nor had he identified her cavalier, who was stooping at the moment to arrange a cloak or cushion at her feet. The whole thing was so instantaneous that but for his companion's remark he might have been persuaded fancy had played him false.

"That's a *case*, I imagine," said Miss Carmine, not observing her oarsman's discomposure, or attributing it, perhaps, to the violent exercise. "They call her a beauty, too, still; but what they can see

in her I can't for the life of me make out. She's much too tall, looks horrid disdainful, and as pale as a ghost."

"She? who?" asked Gerard, slackening his efforts, and preparing to put the boat about for a return.

"Why, Mrs. Vandeleur," answered his companion; "I thought you knew her by the way she stared. She'll know us again at any rate."

"And the gentleman?" asked Gerard in a choking voice, backing water vigorously with one scull the while.

"Oh! that was Burton," answered Miss Carmine; "Dandy Burton, they call him. I suppose they'll get married, those two; and I'm sure it's time they did. They've been talked about long enough."

It was indeed no other than Gerard's old fellow-pupil whom he thus met so unexpectedly with his unforgotten love. The White Rose had been persuaded to join Lady Billesdon's water-party that day at Richmond, and they had all gone up the river in different four-oars, skiffs, and wherries, to visit the roaring cataract at Teddington Lock. Here, however, two young ladies, protesting they were "bad sailors," insisted on returning by road; and

the consequent change of arrangements compelled Mrs. Vandeleur, unless she wished to appear both rude and ridiculous, to make the homeward voyage with Mr. Burton. The two felt the calm of the summer evening, the influence of the quiet lovely scene. Her silence and abstraction did not escape the Dandy's notice, who flattered himself he had at last succeeded in making an impression, which he was careful not to disturb by loquacity or interruption. Neither of them, therefore, volunteered a remark on the boat they had so nearly run down, and they hardly exchanged a syllable till they reached the place of disembarkation, when they observed simultaneously that "it was a beautiful evening; they had spent a pleasant day; it was high time to order the carriages;" and so parted for the night.

Gerard, too, pulled his freight back to Richmond, sad and silent, as the "wordless man" who brought the Dead Lily of Astolat to the lordly towers of Arthur's royal palace. Miss Carmine could not make him out; but recollecting her own undoubted charms of person, manner, and conversation, accounted for his insensibility to all three by a fit of indigestion, the result of rowing too soon after dinner.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REFUSAL.

"DREAMS always go by contraries," yawned Miss Tregunter, waking from her morning slumber for the accustomed cup of tea to fortify her against the toil of dressing. "How I wish they didn't!" added this young lady, recalling with some difficulty the vision in which she had been steeped scarce five minutes ago.

She dreamt she was at a fancy ball in the character of Belinda, with high-heeled shoes, farthingale, patches, and an enormous superstructure of hair-pins, hair-rolls, hair-powder, and pomatum. She knew she was looking her best, and was engaged to dance her first minuet with the Archbishop of Canterbury. It seemed the most natural thing in the world that this prelate, on coming to make his

bow, should be dressed as an Indian brave—scalps, mocassins, war-paint, wampum, beads, and blanket, all complete; that, without resigning church preferment, or losing primitive freedom, he should carry her off, then and there, to his lodge in Kensington Gardens, where he bade her sit on a camp-stool and skin a dead buffalo, while he stepped down to Albert Gate for a look in at Tattersall's; that, having no instruments but a pair of nail-scissors, she made a horrid mess of the buffalo, but skinned him at last, to find Dolly Egremont concealed beneath his hide; that Dolly then explained at great length his views on savage life in general, wound up by a declaration that he couldn't live another day without her, and while he pressed her for an answer to a very important question, raised her hand and was in the act of laying it to his lips, when—how provoking!—her maid came in with the tea, and she awoke.

What puppets we are! Even dreams affect us more than we would like to admit. Miss Tregunter thought of a good many things while she was dressing, on which she had never pondered so deeply before.

In the first place, she allowed herself to wonder, seriously, why she had seen so little of Mr. Egre-

mont during the last few days, whether he had merely grown careless about her, or whether she could in any way have offended him. If so, whether such display of ill-humour was not the best possible sign, as denoting keen interest in herself? It was odd that she never suspected him of jealousy. Perhaps she felt so unconscious of having given him cause. Not for a moment did it occur to her that she had been more than commonly civil to Dandy Burton, and little did she imagine the hopes and schemes of which she was the object in that gentleman's designing brain. Miss Tregunter was a simple-minded person enough, and hardly aware of her own advantages as a pleasant comely young woman, possessed of money in the funds. Although in truth one of the best "catches" of her year, she would have laughed in anybody's face who told her so; cherishing, indeed, with sufficient obstinacy, the romantic notions of a milk-maid on all matters connected with love and matrimony. If ever she was married, she had vowed at fifteen, it should be for herself, not reflecting—for young ladies are but hollow philosophers—how much of that very self consists in externals. Take away education, refinement, social position, all such advantages of For-

'tune's caprice, and, to use a hackneyed metaphor, you leave but the gem, uncut, unpolished, and without its setting—the intrinsic value is, perhaps, nearly the same; but instead of wearing it abroad you probably hide it carefully away, and leave it at home.

Miss Tregunter was a gem no doubt in her way, but ever since she could remember, she had been brightened and worked up by the best jewellers. Deprived of both parents in childhood, she had been educated by an aunt, a Mrs. Maurice Tregunter, related to that deaf Lady Baker, in whom I fear it would be impossible to excite interest. With this aunt, or rather aunt by marriage, not a little to the advantage of that relative, the young heiress lived, in the country, but a few miles from Oakover, and "went out" in London.

The chaperon and her charge got on exceedingly well in both places; none the less, perhaps, that the young lady was passionately fond of riding, an exercise from which the elder was debarred by physical causes, the result of good-living and content. It was the girl's favourite exercise, and nowhere more so than in London. She used to vow that late hours and hot rooms would be too much for her without the restorative of a fresh inspiriting canter before

luncheon the following day. She was not believed, because of her rosy cheeks; nevertheless, the horses came to the door as regularly as if her life depended on that remedy alone, and although she loved a ball dearly, she often declared she would resign satin shoes willingly for life, rather than give up the side-saddle.

Jane Tregunter looked well on horseback; nobody better. She had a light, trim, wiry figure, especially adapted to those feats of skill which depend on balance. Her tapering limbs seemed firm and strong; while her hands and feet, though none of the smallest, were extremely well-shaped. In skating and dancing she was no mean proficient; could waltz "figures of eight" round two chairs, and do "outside edges" backwards, with the best performers; but never perhaps felt so completely in her element as when mounted on her chestnut horse, "Tomboy," giving him what she called "a spin."

Tomboy was usually in good wind—as well he might be—for his young mistress indulged him in these "spins," by which expression she understood a rousing gallop, without drawing bridle, from Apsley House to Kensington Gate, on every available opportunity; and as she rode four or five times a week,

her horse was somewhat lighter in girth and fuller in muscle than most of the fellow-labourers that roused his emulation in the Park. Many an approving glance was cast after them by mounted dandies of every calibre as the pair swept by—the lengthy, well-bred chestnut, with his smooth elastic stride, harmonising so fairly in the real "poetry of motion" with the neat, small-waisted figure of his rider, in its blue habit, its perfectly-fitting gloves, its glistening chignon, and provokingly saucy hat.

Admiring glances, though, were the utmost tribute any cavalier was permitted to offer—Lady Baker, when she took the responsibility of chaperoning Miss Tregunter in her aunt's absence, having made it a *sine quâ non* that the young lady should refuse all escort in these rides, save that of the venerable groom who followed a hundred yards behind, and whose maxims, both of personal comfort and stable management, were considerably deranged by his young mistress's liberal notion of pace.

It may be that Dandy Burton was aware of this standing order when he resolved to march a-foot in his attack on the heiress, during the meeting which she had almost suggested, in the Park. He had been induced of late, partly in consequence of his

money-transactions with Mrs. Vandeleur, to look into his own affairs, and had found, like many of his companions, that his income, though a good one, was quite unequal to his expenditure. Of course he could see but one way out of the difficulty. He must marry an heiress—why not Miss Tregunter? There she was, an oldish young lady, still unappropriated, dividends and all! She had been out a good many years now; she must be waiting for somebody; probably for himself. The iron was never likely to be hotter than at present; he had better strike at once.

Now Mr. Burton, though, like most Englishmen, he was a rider, was not a horseman. The former merely suffers himself to be carried; the latter both gives and receives excitement, spirit, and energy from the exhilarating partnership of man and beast. He, whose home is in the saddle, feels equal to all emergencies when in his favourite position; his courage rises, his shyness vanishes, his self-reliance is redoubled, he feels twice the man, and he never looks to such advantage as on horseback; but the Dandy, though he had passed through his riding-school drill creditably enough, entertained more confidence in his own powers, moral and physical, when

on foot, and would have felt extremely loth to hazard even a declaration of love, much more an offer of marriage, from the back of a light-hearted quadruped, whose ill-timed gambols might at any moment render the most important of questions abortive, the most favourable of answers inaudible.

Thus reflecting, and aware, moreover, that the lady might refuse him permission altogether to accompany her in a ride, the Dandy, dressed for walking with exceeding care, armed, moreover, with the thickest cigar and the thinnest umbrella fabricated in London, took up his post, about half-past twelve, opposite the nearest gate of Kensington Gardens, and waited, not very patiently, for the arrival of Miss Tregunter.

Considering how little he cared for her, he was rather surprised to find how nervous he was. His mouth felt dry, though that might be the effect of his cigar, the worst, of course, in the whole batch; but why his hands should turn cold, and his face hot, he was at a loss to understand. He had proposed to three or four women before, and except in one instance, long ago, when he really cared, it was little more than asking them to dance. He must be getting shaky, he thought, losing his nerve, be-

ginning to grow old! *Raison de plus*, by Jove! and here she came, as usual, at a gallop!

It was a fiercer gallop than common. Tomboy knew as well as his mistress that she was put out, vexed, hurt, irritated, angry. Dolly Egremont had not been near her for three whole days, and Lady Baker, deaf as she was, had heard of his dining "with a lot of actresses, my dear, and those sort of people, such a pity!" at Richmond.

Janey was, therefore, at her worst. The frost is never so bitter as just before its break-up, and it needed no weather-wise prophet to foretell that her severity would ere long thaw, and dissolve itself in floods of tears.

Being piqued with one lover, she naturally returned the salutation of another with suspicious cordiality. Nay, reining up Tomboy, she sidled him, snorting and glowing all over, close to the foot-path; shaking hands with Burton across the rail, and observing meaningly, that "he must have a good memory, and she hoped his early rising wouldn't do him any harm!"

Thus encouraged, the Dandy made his plunge. "Miss Tregunter," said he, looking imploringly up in her face, and then glancing at the groom, to make

sure he was out of hearing, "you're always laughing at a fellow—will you promise not to laugh at me, if I tell you something? I'm in earnest. Upon my soul I am!"

"Ain't I as grave as a judge?" she replied comically, but her heart beat faster, and she didn't quite like it.

"You won't believe me," he continued, speaking very quick, and scanning the ride anxiously each way, in fear of interruption. "I'm not the sort of man you think. I—I'm a domestic fellow in reality. I was happy enough till I began to—to like you so much. Now I'm so bored if I don't see you, I'm perfectly miserable. I've been watching for you here at least an hour" (he dashed away the cigar, not half smoked out, that he had lighted when he took up his station there); "will you—won't you, give me a right to wait for you, and ride with you, and walk with you, and take you about with me everywhere as my wife?"

Then he wished he had not thrown his cigar away, there was such an awkward pause while she looked straight between her horse's ears.

For one moment she wavered. He was handsome, he was well-known, he had a certain spurious

reputation, and it would make Dolly so miserable! This last consideration brought with it the necessary reaction. All her better nature rose in appeal against such an act of rebellion, and Jane Tregunter never seemed so lovely nor so womanly as, while looking frankly down, straight into the Dandy's eyes, she laid her hand in his, and said gently but decidedly, "You pay me a higher compliment, Mr. Burton, than I deserve; nay, than I desire. Many other women would make you far happier than I should. Believe me I am proud of your admiration, and I value your friendship. I shall not lose it, shall I, because I am honest and straightforward in saying No?"

Then she bowed her head, tightened her veil, put Tomboy into a gallop, and never stopped till she reached her own door, where, dismissing him with a kiss in the very middle of his nose, she ran upstairs, locked herself into her own room, and reappeared at luncheon, considerably refreshed by "a good cry," and a dose of *sal volatile* and red lavender.

CHAPTER XIX.

A REBUFF.

MEN have no efficient substitute for either of the above restoratives. Instead of crying, they swear, instead of taking tonics, they consume tobacco, sometimes brandy-and-water, feeling the while what they themselves call "a facer," none the less that they affect to make light of, and carry it off with bravado. The Dandy's heart was perhaps unwounded by Miss Tregunter's refusal, but his self-interest sustained a crushing blow, and, harder yet to bear, his self-esteem was stricken to the dust. So he walked on aimlessly, through that wilderness which stretches its expanse in front of Knightsbridge Barracks, almost wishing that he was a jolly subaltern once more, with no heavier cares in life than the steadiness of his troop, the

fit of his jack-boots, and the length of his charger's tail. He reflected, as we all of us do now and then when things go wrong, how he had wasted time, and energy, and opportunities in the pursuit of —what? When he came to think about it, he could not say that he had been positively pursuing anything except discomfiture. And he had overtaken his quarry to-day, no doubt. He had been unscrupulous, perhaps, but still he owned a conscience, such as it was. Not good enough for happiness, not wicked enough for pleasure, he felt he had botched the whole business from beginning to end, and resolved henceforth to turn over a new leaf, and——but what would the world say? That he had been refused by Miss Tregunter, and was an altered man in consequence. Here he cursed an innocent little girl who crossed his path trundling her innocent little hoop; and having thus relieved his temper, felt more like himself again. No! The world (*his* world, a miserable little *coterie* of five hundred people) should not pity him. He would show them (and much they would care) that he rose the stronger for a fall, the bolder for defeat. Such a repulse as had just checked him could only be covered by an audacious attack, a

startling victory! Then he thought what a fool he had been thus to put himself in Miss Tregunter's power. Could he depend upon her silence? He believed not. At any rate it was against all his maxims to trust a woman to hold her tongue. She wasn't half a bad girl after all; beyond a feeling of soreness, he bore her no grudge for her refusal, though he pitied her bad taste; but to suppose that she would abstain from sticking into her cap such a feather as the conquest of Dandy Burton, was simply absurd. She would tell her intimate friends. Mrs. Vandeleur, of course. And now something really stung him to the quick, while he thought how soon this last piece of tomfoolery would come to the knowledge of the White Rose. She had been cooler than usual to him of late, she had even snubbed him very decidedly in public, and he fancied he could detect in her manner an impatience of his friendly professions, of the obligations under which he had placed her, and of the terms on which they stood. Women often married fellows, he argued, for no better reason than to get out of an anomalous position. There was nobody else in the field, that he knew of. Stay! There was a mysterious rival somewhere, but the world could only shrug its bare

worldly shoulders, and nod, and whisper, without being able to point out the man. "It was strange," said the world behind its fan, "that such a woman as that, so handsome, so high-spirited, so independent, should have no acknowledged lover in society; less strange, perhaps, you will say, my dear, when I assure you that I know from the best authority she does disappear once or twice a week, and nobody can tell what becomes of her. She is always back to dinner, that I can prove, because mine is half-sister to dear Lady Tattle's maid, who was with Mrs. Vandeleur all last season. Depend upon it there's something queer about her. She don't dye her hair, she wears her own teeth, and as for Madame Rachel, I know it's not that, because I—Well, never mind, why, but I know it isn't. Of course, it's very foolish, and the way to get herself talked about. Such a pity, dear, isn't it?"

All this, thought Burton, was so much in favour of any well-bred, well-known man, who should offer to make her his wife in a plain, sensible way, apart from everything like sentiment or romance. If her position was insecure, it would be fortified by a husband, and what a pleasant house might be kept, what charming little dinners might be given, by

such a man as himself, for instance, and such a woman as the White Rose! What an idiot he had been to make Jane Tregunter an offer, when, perhaps, he might marry Mrs. Vandeleur out-of-hand. By the time he reached Albert Gate he began to think he was very much in love with her.

The Dandy's, however, was no unreasoning or uncalculating affection. He added to the lady's personal charms many more lasting advantages, such as jointure, private fortune, position, and acquaintances. Ere he was well out of the Park, he said to himself, he had got a strong pull over her, and he would be an ass not to use it. While he turned the corner of the street she lived in, he resolved to run his chance then and there; by the time he reached her door, he assured himself, though not very heartily, that the fight was as good as over, and he must gain the victory. She could not be out, for there was her brougham, with its handsome brown horse, in waiting, so he tore a leaf off his betting-book and sent up a line, as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. V.,—May I see you for one moment —not on business? Please say yes!"

In two minutes he was following Robert Smart up

the well-known staircase, feeling a little nervous, but pluming himself notwithstanding on his spirit of adventure in thus proposing to two women the same morning, before he sat down to luncheon.

Ushered into the familiär drawing-room, he found Mrs. Vandeleur at the writing-table with her bonnet on, ready dressed to go out. She finished her note hastily, dashing off the signature with a scrawl, shook hands with him, and said, as composedly as if he had been her grandfather,—

"What can I do for you, Mr. Burton? I am afraid luncheon is quite cold."

It was a bad beginning. His *savoir faire* told him that for such a purpose as he had in view, the gentleman could not be too calm and collected, with plenty of leisure before him; the lady, however flurried, should by no means be in haste. He knew he had better back out and put it off, but goaded by the reflection that his late defeat would become public property long before dinner-time, he advanced with the courage of despair.

"You can give me five minutes," he replied; "I will try not to detain you longer."

"Speak up!" she answered, with a laugh, seating herself a long way off.

He was standing on the hearth-rug, smoothing the glossy surface of his hat. Like every other man under similar circumstances, this employment afforded him a certain confidence. Deprived of the instrument, he would have been utterly and idiotically helpless.

"Mrs. Vandeleur," he began, "I have had the pleasure of knowing you a long time. Our interests have lately become identical."

The proud look was gathering on her face, crossed with a shade of scorn.

"Mr. Burton," she replied, "I deny the position."

"Well!" he retorted, a little nettled. "The world, at least, is good enough to think so. I have proved my friendship—more, my devotion—in the only way the nineteenth century permits. Formerly a man got his head broken for the sake of the lady he admired. To-day he goes into the City and sees her lawyer for her. You have difficulties. Let them become mine. People talk about us. Give them a reason for talking. They have joined our names together. Let us join them ourselves for good and all."

No amount of anger or vexation could have been

so discomfiting as the blank bewilderment on Mrs. Vandeleur's haughty face.

"Mr. Burton!" said she. "Are you in your senses?"

"Perfectly," he replied, growing red with wrath. "And if you were too, you could hardly hesitate in accepting an offer so obviously to your advantage."

She rose from her chair with the port of an empress, and every syllable she uttered in her clear, cold voice, cut sharp and true, like a knife.

"Mr. Burton, I thank you for teaching me a lesson I ought perhaps to have learnt long ago. I now see that a woman in my position cannot have a *man*-friend without subjecting herself to misconstruction and insult. Yes, insult; for I consider your suggestion, made in such a way, neither more nor less. Not another day will I remain under the slightest obligation to you,—not an hour, if I can help it! What you propose is impossible, and I regret it—you needn't look pleased—I regret it for this reason, that, were it possible, I might better make you understand the scorn and loathing with which I reject your offer, and which I hope it is not unladylike in me to express. When we meet in society, it will be as the merest acquaintance. You

startled me at first, but I will not pay you the compliment of saying I am surprised. Good morning, Mr. Burton; I need not detain you another moment."

Thus speaking, she swept out of the room with one of those bows, which, for courtesy of dismissal, is about equivalent to a slap in the face.

He had caught an outward polish from the society in which he lived, and held the door open for her to pass, but he was not a gentleman all through, and cursed her bitterly as he stepped downstairs, muttering between his teeth that "he would be even with her before all was done!" He never knew exactly how he got into the street, but when there, observed the brougham had not left the door. A bright thought struck him, which was less, perhaps, an inspiration of the moment than the result of many previous suspicions brought to a head, as it were, by spite. Collecting all his energies, he resolved to act on it forthwith.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REASON WHY.

"It's to be war to the knife, is it?" said the Dandy to the nearest lamp-post. "All right; I am agreeable, my lady, and I advise you to look out!" Then he thought of the one suspicion about Mrs. Vandeleur, the one speck that tarnished the petals of the White Rose. If he could make himself master of this secret, unmask the intrigue that he never doubted it involved, and identify the lover for whose sake she ran so great a risk, he would be able to dictate his own terms. After all, you see the Dandy was not the least a gentleman, in the real acceptation of the word, though he was received as such by society; but he had plenty of cunning, a fair share of tact, and many of the less estimable qualities which go to form a shrewd man of the world.

"Never make a rush at your adversary, after receiving a severe blow," say the mentors of the prize-ring. "Keep out of distance, shake your head a little, and collect yourself, before you go in again."

Dandy Burton, sore and quivering from the punishment he had sustained, acted on this wholesome advice, smoothed his ruffled feathers, and began to think.

He looked at his watch; it was but little after two o'clock. Mrs. Vandeleur must have ordered luncheon at least an hour sooner than usual. He knew the ways of the house and the habits of its mistress. He was aware she would not go shopping so early. There was a great breakfast to-day at the Cowslips, but he had heard her say she should send an excuse. All London would be there, and Mrs. Vandeleur seldom refused anything of Lady Syllabubs. There must be some reason for this unusual seclusion. Perhaps it was her day for the mysterious expedition?—the day of all others she had better have kept friends with him. Now was the time to follow and find her out.

Two doors off stood a four-wheeled cab, just dismissed. The driver having only received his proper

fare, was crawling sulkily off at a walk. Burton hailed him, and jumped in.

"Is your horse pretty fresh?" said he, showing a half-crown in his fingers.

Fresh! Of course he was as fresh as paint. Who ever heard of a cab-horse being tired when the fare looked like a shilling a mile?

"Then drive to the other end of the street," continued the Dandy. "Watch that brougham with a brown horse. He can trot, mind you, and you must put on the steam. Don't lose sight of it for a moment. Follow within twenty yards wherever it goes."

Then he pulled both windows up, and waited—waited—patiently enough, with his eye on the dark-coloured brougham.

What is it they do? Mrs. Vandeleur had been ready dressed from top to toe when he entered her house a quarter of an hour ago, yet it was at least another quarter of an hour before she emerged. The brown horse, however, made up for lost time, starting off, directly he heard the carriage-door bang, at a good twelve miles an hour. Could she be going shopping after all? The brougham was pulled up at a stupendous establishment for the

promotion of feminine extravagance, and its occupant went in looking extremely like a purchaser; but at the door she spoke to her footman, who touched his hat, mounted the box from which he had lately descended, and was driven slowly away.

"Carriage ordered home," thought Burton; "don't want the servants to talk. Scent improves every yard. There's no bolt-hole to this place, for I've been in it a hundred times. She must come out again the same way. Patience, my boy—we shall be even with her yet."

He had not long to wait. She soon re-appeared with an extra veil on, and a small paper parcel in her hand. Hailing a passing cab, and sadly soiling her dress against the wheel getting in, she was off again; but he had no fear now of her escaping him. His driver, too, entered thoroughly into the spirit of the chase, well aware that such jobs as these afforded a lucrative day's work.

What a wearisome business it was, jingling at the rate of six miles an hour through those interminable streets that lead to the suburbs of London on the Kensington side. The Dandy hated discomfort, and no vehicle but a Wallachian waggon could have been less adapted to commodious transit than that in

which he found himself. The seat was high and sloping; the roof jammed a new hat down on his eyebrows; the cushions, of a faded plush, felt damp and slippery; the windows rattled in their frames; the whole interior smelt of mould, old clothes, and wet straw. He would have abandoned the pursuit more than once, but that the spirit of spite, vengeance, and wounded self-love, kept him up.

As he rumbled on, his suspicions and anticipations of a crowning triumph increased more and more. The length of the journey, the distance from her own home—all these precautions argued something of a nature which the world would condemn as very disgraceful if found out. What a bright idea his had been thus to constitute himself a spy on her actions, and attain the power of showing her up! He exulted, this man, in the probable degradation of the woman he had implored an hour ago to be his wife, and there was nobody to kick him—more's the pity.

The turns became shorter, the houses less imposing. Passing new streets and plots of ground "To let on Building Lease," they soon reached real standard trees and leafy hedges. Burton's driver was already revolving in his mind the remunera-

tive nature of the job, calculating how high a sum he might venture to charge for "back fare," when the cab he followed stopped with a jerk at a green door, let into a garden wall surrounding a house of which the roof and chimneys could alone be seen from outside.

Burton squeezed himself into a corner of his hiding-place, and watched Mrs. Vandeleur dismiss her cab. There seemed no hesitation about the fare, and she tendered it with an air of decision that denoted she was here not for the first nor second time. The Dandy's exultation was only damped by certain misgivings as to his own position if he ventured further, supposing there was a lover in the case, supposing that lover should be irascible, prone to personal collision, and disposed to resent a liberty with blows. There was no time, however, for hesitation, and he possessed, at least, that mere physical indifference to a wrangle which depends chiefly on digestion. He was out of his cab the instant Mrs. Vandeleur passed through the green door.

Either by accident or design she left it ajar, and he followed so close on her track as to catch a glimpse of her dress while she turned an angle

of the shrubbery in which he found himself. It was one of those snug secluded retreats to be rented by scores within an hour's drive of London in any direction, and which convey as perfect an idea of privacy and retirement as the most remote manor-house in Cumberland or Cornwall. Through a vista in the shrubbery, rich with its fragrance of lilacs and syringa, gleaming with Portugal laurels and gilded with drooping laburnums, the intruder caught a glimpse of a long low white building, surrounded by a verandah defended with creepers, sun-shades, Venetian blinds, and other contrivances of a stifling nature to keep out the heat.

He followed up the chase by a winding path through the densest of this suburban thicket, to emerge on a trim, well-kept lawn, studded with a few stone vases, and overshadowed by a gigantic elm, girdled with a circular wooden seat.

Under the shade of this fine old tree, a garden-chair had been wheeled, but Mrs. Vandeleur's undulating figure, as she crossed the lawn, hid its occupant from the spy's observation, although for a moment he fancied he could detect the silvery hair of an old man's head reclining against the cushions.

He had no time, however, to speculate. The White Rose, who had ignored him patiently till he was too far advanced for retreat, turned fiercely on him now, and the Dandy never felt so small as while he stood there in the summer sunshine, thoroughly ashamed of himself, quivering like a beaten hound, and shrinking from the insupportable scorn of those merciless eyes.

She spoke low, as people often do when they mean what they say, but her whole figure seemed to dilate and grow taller in its concentration of disgust and defiance; nor will I take upon me to affirm that, through all Mr. Burton's discomfiture, there did not lurk a faint glimmer of consolation to think he had escaped such a Tartar for a wife.

"I congratulate you," she said; "I make you my compliments on the high chivalrous spirit you have displayed to-day, and your gentleman-like conduct throughout. Do you think I am an idiot, Mr. Burton? Do you flatter yourself I have not seen through you? I knew you were following me here from the moment I left 'Barége and Tulle's' in the cab; I determined to give you a lesson, and now you have it! This, sir, is the intrigue I have carried on for years. Here is the lover I come to see.

Ah! look at him, and thank your stars that he is no longer the Vandeleur you remember in the pride and strength of manhood. (Hush! dear, hush!)" and she laid her hand caressingly on the brows of the feeble drivelling idiot, whose eye was beginning to brighten, and his pulses to stir with the only sensation he had left, that of jealousy at the presence of any one with his wife. Her glance was soft and tender while she soothed her husband, but it gleamed like steel when it turned again on the unhappy Dandy. "Yes," she continued, "you may thank your stars, I say; for, by Heaven! if this was the man of a dozen years ago, he would have kicked you from here back to London, every step of the way! Now go!"

And Dandy Burton went sneaking through the shrubbery and the garden-door, like a detected pickpocket, glad to find the miserable cab that brought him still in waiting, thankful to hide his head in that mouldy refuge, rejoicing to hurry back and lose himself amongst a myriad of fellow-reptiles in town.

But the day's excitement and the day's anxiety were not yet over for Mrs. Vandeleur. The ruling passion that had destroyed her husband's intellect,

already sapped by excess and self-indulgence, thus excited by the intruder's presence, blazed into the first lucid interval he had known since his fatal injuries. The poor idiot seemed to awake from some long, deep, dreamless slumber, and reason returned for the space of a few hours, during which he recognised Norah, conversed with her, and called her by name. She had nursed him, tended him, looked after him for years, yet never before, since his accident, had he even looked as if he knew she was there. But it was the parting gleam of sunset on a rainy evening, the flash of the candle expiring in its socket.

By ten o'clock that night John Vandeleur was lying dead in the secluded retreat, which had been to him a living tomb from the day he was brought into it, crushed, mangled, and insane, after his ghastly leap into the court-yard of the hotel at Heidelberg.

END OF VOL. II.

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